



Block 2

Classical Athens





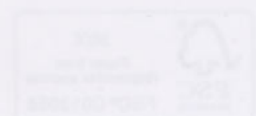
The Open University

A219 Exploring the Classical World

Block 2

Classical Athens

Felix Budelmann, Lorna Hardwick and James Robson



This publication forms part of an Open University course A219 *Exploring the Classical World*. Details of this and other Open University courses can be obtained from the Student Registration and Enquiry Service, The Open University, PO Box 197, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BJ, United Kingdom: tel. +44 (0)870 333 4340, email general-enquiries@open.ac.uk

Alternatively, you may visit the Open University website at <http://www.open.ac.uk> where you can learn more about the wide range of courses and packs offered at all levels by The Open University.

To purchase a selection of Open University course materials visit <http://www.ouw.co.uk>, or contact Open University Worldwide, Michael Young Building, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, United Kingdom for a brochure. tel. +44 (0)1908 858785; fax +44 (0)1908 858787; email ouwenq@open.ac.uk

The Open University
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

First published 2006.

Copyright © 2006 The Open University

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher or a licence from the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd. Details of such licences (for reprographic reproduction) may be obtained from the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd of 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP.

Open University course materials may also be made available in electronic formats for use by students of the University. All rights, including copyright and related rights and database rights, in electronic course materials and their contents are owned by or licensed to The Open University, or otherwise used by The Open University as permitted by applicable law.

In using electronic course materials and their contents you agree that your use will be solely for the purposes of following an Open University course of study or otherwise as licensed by The Open University or its assigns.

Except as permitted above you undertake not to copy, store in any medium (including electronic storage or use in a website), distribute, transmit or retransmit, broadcast, modify or show in public such electronic materials in whole or in part without the prior written consent of The Open University or in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Edited and designed by The Open University.

Typeset by The Open University.

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd, Padstow.

ISBN 0 7492 9649 6

1.2

297400B/a219_b2_e1i2_ISBN0749296496

The paper used in this publication contains pulp sourced from forests independently certified to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) principles and criteria. Chain of custody certification allows the pulp from these forests to be tracked to the end use (see www.fsc-uk.org)



CONTENTS

Introduction to Block 2	5
Block timetable	5
Aims and objectives	5
Materials required	6
General orientation	6
 Part 1 The Greek theatre and Aeschylus' <i>Persians</i>	 8
1.1 The Persian Wars	8
1.2 A first encounter with Aeschylus' <i>Persians</i>	11
1.3 Theatre in fifth-century BCE Athens	14
1.4 Structure and narrative in <i>Persians</i>	27
1.5 Greeks and Persians	34
1.6 Historical and cultural context	40
1.7 Close reading: the Queen's dream	50
1.8 The Athenian audience and the <i>Persians</i>	52
References	56
Further reading	57
 Part 2 The Acropolis and the Parthenon frieze	 58
2.1 Introduction	58
2.2 Historical and political context	61
2.3 The architectural context	64
2.4 The Acropolis	69
2.5 The Parthenon	73
2.6 The Parthenon frieze	80
2.7 Review	102
References	103
Further reading	103

Part 3 The Funeral Speech (<i>Epitaphios Logos</i>)	104
3.1 Introduction	104
3.2 Reading the Funeral Speech in Thucydides	106
3.3 Pericles' Funeral Speech and other ancient speeches	112
3.4 Later recontextualisations and rereadings	121
3.5 Public funerals in modern times	124
References	128
Further reading	129
Part 4 Aristophanes' <i>Lysistrata</i>	130
4.1 Introduction	130
4.2 Aristophanes and Old Comedy	131
4.3 Political and historical background	134
4.4 The <i>Lysistrata</i>	136
4.5 From text to performance	161
4.6 Historical postscript	166
References	166
Further reading	167
Part 5 Conclusion to Block 2	169
Appendix 1 Notes on 'Panathenaia' encyclopaedia entry	171
Appendix 2 Timeline: Classical Athens	172

Introduction to Block 2

Block timetable

This block comprises six weeks' work: that is, five study weeks and a final week to write TMA 03 (where you will be required to comment on a short text or image and write an essay). The block is divided into four main parts (and a fifth concluding part). Each of the main parts provides different insights into fifth-century BCE Athens.

- 1 **The Greek theatre and Aeschylus' *Persians*.** A study of Aeschylus' tragedy of 472 BCE, which takes as its subject matter the recent struggle between Persia and the Greek states. As essential background to this play you will also look at fifth-century BCE Greek theatre in general. Study of this part will take about one and a half weeks.
- 2 **The Acropolis and the Parthenon frieze.** In this part you will look at the archaeological remains from the Athenian Acropolis. Your work will also involve consideration of how we can evaluate Classical art and architecture. Again, it will take you roughly one and a half weeks to study this part.
- 3 **The Funeral Speech (*Epitaphios Logos*).** Your work on Pericles' influential speech, as recorded by the historian Thucydides, will take about one week. This will involve consideration of both its ancient context and the nature of public rhetoric within a wider historical framework.
- 4 **Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.** The final part of this block is a study of Aristophanes' comedy of 411 BCE and will take roughly one week to complete.
- 5 **Conclusion to Block 2.** Consolidation and revision in your final week on this block.

You should try to keep to the timetable in this block as much as possible, to allow you to complete the TMA at the appropriate time. You can also consult your Study Calendar to see how the work is divided up.

Aims and objectives

In this block, you will be working with a broader range of evidence than you have dealt with previously. You will look at sources as diverse as tragedy, comedy, art, architecture and history – both as artistic works in their own right and also to gain access to, and establish a picture of, the world of fifth-century BCE Athens. In so doing, you will gain new knowledge and new skills, building on those you acquired in Block 1.

The main learning outcomes of this block are:

- 1 To acquire skills needed for working with and contextualising literary sources such as drama, history and rhetoric.
- 2 To enable you to engage with visual evidence, including plan reading and working with archaeological evidence.
- 3 Through critical and close reading, to bring ideas and information drawn from a wide variety of sources to bear on a given cultural question.
- 4 To gain an overview of the political and cultural world of fifth-century BCE Athens, and to explore some of the key tensions and issues of the age.

Materials required

To study this block you will need:

- *Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (OCCC)
- *A Brief History of Ancient Greece: Politics, Society, and Culture* (BHAG)
- Book of Essays: *Experiencing the Classical World* (ECW)
- Readings Book 1
- Illustrations Book
- Audio-Visual Notes 1
- Assignment Book
- CD2, 'Aeschylus: *Persians*'; CD3, 'Funeral speeches ancient and modern'
- DVD2, Section 1, 'The Greek theatre and *Persians*'; Section 2, 'Plan reading'; Section 3, 'The Acropolis and its buildings'
- Course website ('ICT': timeline, pronunciation guide, online maps; 'Course links Block 2')



General orientation

In this block, the focus of your study changes from Homer to Athens in the fifth century BCE. As you will see, the Greek world changed greatly in the period following the 'Dark Age'. The Archaic Age, as it is known (roughly 700–480 BCE), saw the emergence of city states and Greek colonies throughout the Mediterranean, as well as notable developments in areas



such as literature and art. You may already have learned something about this period by reading Chapter 3 of *BHAG* (pp.61–90), but if not, you will probably find it useful to spend a few moments looking at some of the chapter's headings, documents and figures to gain a brief impression of the era.

Your work in this block will concentrate on *Classical* Greece, however. As you learned in Essay One of *Experiencing the Classical World*, the divisions which scholars draw between historical eras tend to be made on the basis of a significant historical or cultural event, and the division between the Archaic and Classical eras is no exception. The significant events which occurred in 480–479 BCE were the last major battles on and near mainland Greece between Greeks and the would-be invaders from Persia. Victory in the Persian Wars had an immense impact on Greeks in general and Athens in particular, and some of the central themes in this block are the political and cultural developments which followed in the wake of these wars, especially the changing ways in which Athenians viewed themselves in the fifth century BCE.

Part 1 The Greek theatre and Aeschylus' *Persians*

The first text you will study in this block is *Persians*, a tragedy by Aeschylus, the earliest of the well-known Athenian playwrights. He lived from c.525 to c.456 BCE, and was the author of no fewer than 70 and perhaps even 90 plays, only seven of which survive. *Persians* is the earliest of those seven, first performed in 472 BCE; in fact it is the earliest Greek tragedy to survive in its entirety (we have short fragments of some earlier ones). For the purposes of this course, there is no need for you to know much else about Aeschylus, but if you are curious you could look up the relevant entry in the *OCCC*.



You will be listening to *Persians* shortly on CD2. As you will see, its subject matter is what is generally called the 'Persian Wars'. First of all, therefore, it will be useful for you to find out more about these wars. With that background in mind, you will be in a strong position to begin work on the play itself. In turn, once you have done some initial work on the play, you will be able to find out about Greek theatre in general, using *Persians* as an example text. And then, being now acquainted with the material that underlies *Persians* (the Persian Wars), as well as with theatre in fifth-century BCE Athens, you will undertake a thorough study of the play.

1.1 The Persian Wars

In the introduction to this block, you learned that scholars often use the Persian Wars as the event that marks the end of the Archaic period and the beginning of the Classical period. Let's have a look now at these wars, to start off your work on this part.

Exercise

Read the sections on the Persians and the wars between Persians and Greeks in *BHAG*. The chapters most relevant to *Persians* are those about invasions of the Greek mainland, first by Darius and then by Xerxes (pp.129–37). But I suggest you have a very quick look initially at the preceding sections on the rise of Persia and the Ionian rebellion (pp.122–9): these will give you a useful background by describing the lead-up to the invasions.



Once you have done this, go to the timeline and add any events – both Persian or Athenian domestic affairs and those concerning their confrontation – that are missing and strike you as significant. Don't



worry about the detail. A basic grasp of the main events will be all you need. If your timeline has ten or twelve events concerning the wars between Persia and Greece when you are finished, this will easily be enough, including those that are already there. And remember: it is worth continuing to add events to the timeline throughout the course, even when you aren't explicitly asked to. By the end of the course this will give you a personalised timeline that should help you in your revision.

Discussion

I jotted down the following dates on my timeline, probably not quite the same as yours:

612 BCE	Medes overthrow Assyrian empire.
559–530 BCE	Cyrus II extends Persian empire, with Media and Lydia among the provinces.
522–586 BCE	Darius I reorganises empire.
499–494 BCE	Ionian revolt (already in your timeline).
490 BCE	Darius invades Greece (already in your timeline).
487 BCE	In Athens, selection by lot established as mechanism for choosing certain officials (<i>archōns</i>) and ostracism first used. Both are aspects of increasingly democratic procedures.
486 BCE	Xerxes succeeds his father Darius, and soon begins to prepare for invading Greece (already in your timeline). Meanwhile Athenians under influence of Themistocles extend their fleet.
481 BCE	Alliance of 31 Greek states, including Athens, but giving command to Spartans. Other states submit to Persia.
480 BCE	Xerxes invades Greece (already in your timeline). Greek (mostly Spartan) defeat at Thermopylae (already in your timeline). Indecisive Greek victory in naval battle at Artemisium. Athens abandoned and sacked. Major Greek victory in naval battle at Salamis, led by Themistocles (already in your timeline). You will

see that this battle is at the heart of Aeschylus' *Persians*.

479 BCE

Important Greek victory at Plataea; Greek victory in naval battle at Mycale in Ionia (already in your timeline).

If you haven't yet done so, I suggest you look up some of the place names on maps. The online map linked to the course website contains the most important ones. Figures 5.7 and 5.11 in *BHAG* have further detail; see also the map of the Persian empire in Figure 2.1 below. One of the difficult things to come to grips with in first encountering Greek history is the somewhat vague definition of what it means to be 'Greek'. As you read in *BHAG*, Greeks didn't just live on the mainland (including Athens and Sparta) but also on the coast of Asia Minor (including the former Troy, which had become a historic place you visited rather than a live city). And, as you learned in Block 1, that region, which also includes many islands in the east of the Aegean, is called Ionia. By contrast with the mainland

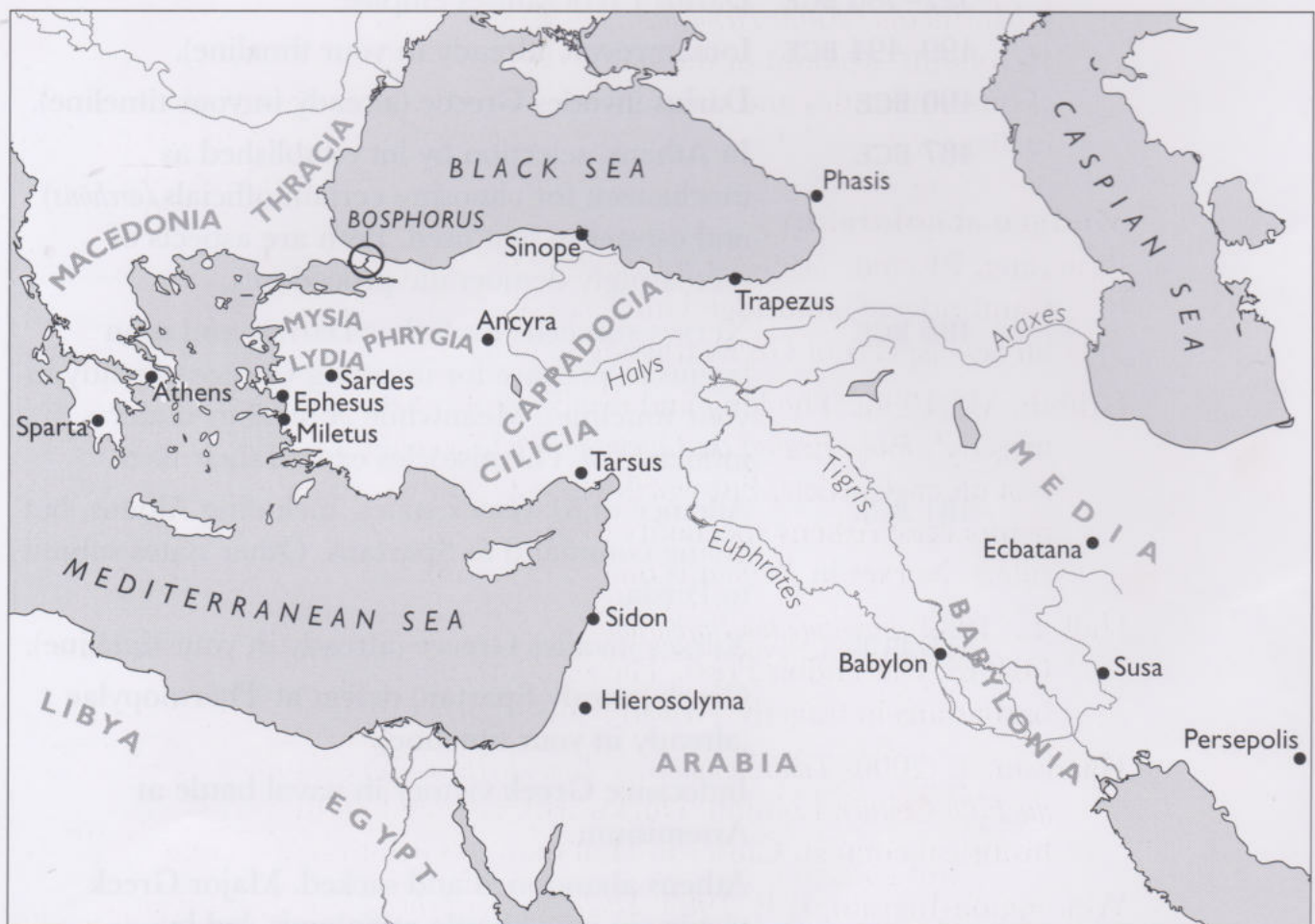


Figure 2.1 The Persian empire c.500 BCE. © The Open University. The map shows the enormous size of the empire compared to that of Greece. Susa, the Persian capital, is situated near the bottom right of the map.

Greeks, the Ionian Greeks were not independent at the beginning of the fifth century BCE. They were ruled by the Persians. It is a hotly debated question to what degree all Greeks felt they belonged together as a single political, cultural or racial group. What is clear, though, is that the need to defend themselves against the common threat of the Persians strengthened the sense of Greek identity. The various battles you read about were fought by various groupings, with different Greek states involved to different degrees. You may have noted that *BHAG* sometimes refers to 'the Greeks', and sometimes to 'the Athenians', 'the Spartans', and so on. This blend of local and general 'Greek' identity reflects sources of the time. You will notice it again in *Persians* and also later on in this block.

1.2 A first encounter with Aeschylus' *Persians*

Now that you are familiar with the main events and some of the issues of the Persian Wars, you can turn to Aeschylus' *Persians*.

Exercise

Before listening to the play on CD2, pause for a few minutes and ask yourself what might be the main difficulties in turning the material of the Persian Wars into drama. There is no need to write an essay, but you may want to jot down a few notes.

Discussion

There are clearly significant challenges to be overcome and choices to be made in writing a drama on the basis of the Persian Wars. At the top of my list are the following points (though again, I am sure that you will have come up with a slightly different set):

- The Persian Wars involved a large number of people, both Greeks and Persians. The central events included several mass battles. It would be impossible to portray them on stage.
- These battles, and indeed other important events, took place in many different places. Some of them, such as the battles of Artemisium and Salamis, were fought at sea. This adds further problems to the staging.
- Moreover, the Persian Wars were fought over a number of years. There were gaps between the various battles. How would a drama accommodate these gaps?

- Last but not least: where is the dramatic interest? Yes, the Persian Wars were tremendously important to the Greeks and hence of obvious intrinsic interest. But most drama is in some way about individuals: their fears, hopes, thoughts, mistakes, sufferings and so on. The narrative you read in *BHAG* highlights various key individuals, both Greek and Persian, but what would their story be?

Of course, all these challenges (and I suspect most of the further challenges *you* thought of) can be overcome. In fact, you may already have been thinking about how a dramatist could respond to them. Or you may have thought of particular plays based on subject matter that in some way posed similar challenges (the play that occurred to me is Shakespeare's *Henry V*).

Exercise

Now listen to the performance of *Persians* on CD2. While you listen, note the choices Aeschylus makes in turning the Persian Wars into a play. How does he overcome the difficulties you and I have thought about? What do you find particularly noteworthy or perhaps even surprising about the choices he makes?



Five quick points of advice before you start listening:

- 1 It's up to you whether you want to read along in the text at the same time (Reading 2.1). Different people have different preferences. In any case, you will get the chance to go through the play for a second time later on in the block.
- 2 The recording is a little over an hour long. If possible, try to listen to it in one sitting, so as to gain an impression of the play as a whole.
- 3 As with Homer, there are aspects you will not fully understand on first listening. For instance, there are passages with long lists of names that will be unfamiliar to you. Don't worry about this. Concentrating on the main structure of the play is perfectly sufficient at this stage. Later you will get to study the play in more depth, and some notes to help you with difficult passages are provided after the text of the play in Readings Book 1. But even then, some uncertainties on points of detail may remain. There is nothing wrong with that, given that you only have one week to study the play. I suspect something similar was the case when you read Homer in Block 1.



- 4 Part of the reason for having the CD is that listening adds an important dimension that reading alone can't convey. However, keep in mind that you are still missing the crucial visual side, including movements, sets, costumes and so on. As we will explore later, one of the challenges of studying plays is the need to bring together textual and visual aspects.
- 5 The CD is a complete recording of the text, without any cuts or changes on the part of the director. The only discrepancy is in certain wails and exclamations. The translation we use (by Edith Hall) simply transliterates them, creating cries such as *otototoi, aiai*. Since these turned out to be difficult to render convincingly, the director decided to cut or adapt a few of them.

Discussion

The first thing that strikes me about Aeschylus' choices is one of those aspects that are easier to pick up when you watch than when you listen: the setting. The scene of *Persians* is the Persian capital Susa. All battles are merely narrated. As a result, there are no issues about accommodating mass scenes or changes of place.

The next choice Aeschylus makes is to set the play after the naval battle at Salamis, near the end of Xerxes' campaign. We have him come on stage defeated. This allows Aeschylus to look back over almost the whole of Darius' and Xerxes' campaigns. There is a sense of finality: the Greeks have won and the Persians have lost. This finality would have been impossible if the play had been set during Darius' campaign, or earlier on in Xerxes' campaign. (Incidentally, if you read along you will have noticed that 'Darius' is spelled 'Dareios' in the translation you use. Like 'Achilles' and 'Akhilleus' or 'Athena' and 'Athene', this is one of many Greek names for which there are alternative spellings.)

Next, characters. Surprisingly perhaps for a Greek play, there is not one Greek character or even a Greek name in the play. The entire story is enacted and reported by Persians. The individual at the centre of the play is Xerxes. He only appears near the end, but right from the start this is a play about his decision to go to war, his decisions about how to conduct the war and in the end about his defeat and return home. I don't know whether you feel that this story makes for satisfactory drama. Some people have found the play rather static – an issue I will come back to later. But in any case, it is clear that Aeschylus decided to tell the story partly through focusing on an

individual, and that this individual is Xerxes, rather than one of the Greeks.

All these points will need further discussion, and I hope that some of the other noteworthy aspects of Aeschylus' way of handling the story that you have come up with will also be addressed in the course of the block. For now, it is enough to note that Aeschylus clearly made some interesting choices in putting the Persian Wars on stage. To understand some of these choices better, let us now look at fifth-century BCE Athenian theatre in general.

1.3 Theatre in fifth-century BCE Athens

In Section 1.2 you learned about the Persian Wars as a necessary context for Aeschylus' *Persians*. Another, equally important, context to keep in mind is that of Athenian theatre performances. Fifth-century BCE Athens produced a wealth of theatre. Almost all ancient Greek plays that have survived until today were composed and first performed in Athens in the fifth or early fourth century BCE. This is not to say that other cities or other periods produced no theatre – far from it. Athens may well have been pre-eminent in the fifth century BCE, and the fifth century may have experienced a particularly rich theatre life, but theatre was produced elsewhere and at other times. The trouble is that, for various reasons, most of those other works did not come down to us. Almost all we have is Athenian. Therefore, in studying the (Athenian) theatre context for Aeschylus' *Persians* (and indeed for the *Lysistrata* later in the block), you are studying what is often called, in a somewhat lazy kind of shorthand, 'Greek' theatre, 'Greek' tragedy, 'Greek' comedy and so on.

Exercise

As a preparation for exploring the context of theatre in Athens, briefly go through the following headings. For each of them, remind yourself of a few characteristics of theatre as you know it in your culture (there is no need to make notes).

Theatre design: What do the acting space, the space in which spectators sit and the surroundings look like?

Occasion and scheduling: When do performances take place and how often? Are performances repeated?

Actors: Who are they (e.g. professional/amateur)? What sort of costumes do they wear? What style of acting do they use?

Audiences: Who goes to the theatre?

Reviews and prizes: Who passes judgement on the quality of performances, and in what form and context?

Finance: How are theatre productions financed?

Since I don't know what culture you live in, and what kind of theatre you have in mind, I don't want to provide any discussion. Instead, I would ask you to keep in mind how the various aspects of theatre as you know it contribute to your overall theatre experience.

With that in mind, let us move on to theatre in fifth-century BCE Athens, the context in which Aeschylus composed *Persians*.

Exercise

Use the same headings as in the previous exercise. For each of them, try to establish some important characteristics of fifth-century BCE Athenian theatre. What are the similarities and differences compared to theatre in your own culture?

This exercise, as well as the one that follows, demands a larger degree of self-direction than those you have done so far. It gives you the opportunity to do a manageable piece of research of your own and to develop your research skills. To help you, you are provided with the following two sources of information. Obviously, feel free to go beyond them if you have the time, but these two should give you most of what you need:



- 1 DVD2, Section 1, 'The Greek theatre and *Persians*', Tracks 1–4. I recommend you start by watching these four chapters. They are based on interviews with two experts in the Greek theatre, Oliver Taplin and Edith Hall (who also wrote the translation of *Persians* we use). In particular the first two tracks, on ancient theatre space and the audience and on ancient acting respectively, are directly relevant to the exercise. Tracks 3 and 4, about the survival of Greek tragedy from its first performance until today and about twentieth-century performances of *Persians*, are less immediately relevant here. However, I suggest you watch them now as well; they will be a useful introduction to your study of

Persians and for work you will do on modern performances when you study the *Lysistrata* later in the block. If you don't have much time right now, though, I would suggest you focus just on Tracks 1 and 2, and watch the other two later. I also suggest you take notes while you watch, using the six headings above.

- 2 The *OCCC*. There are several entries that are relevant, and you may discover some that I haven't seen. In particular, you should find useful the material under 'theatres (Greek and Roman), structure' and 'tragedy, Greek, I.3 "Dramatic festivals" and I.4 "Form and performance"'. There is also some less detailed material in *BHAG*, pp.183–4.



Again, there's no need to write anything long; just collect notes under each of the headings, bringing together the material you find in the various sources you use.

Discussion

I have used the same headings as you, both drawing on the sources I recommended to you and adding some further points. Like you, I have concentrated on highlights, rather than trying to provide a full account. Again, I haven't said anything about theatre in your own culture, but I hope that thinking about the comparison will have helped you sharpen your understanding of theatre in fifth-century BCE Athens.

Theatre design

Figures 2.2 and 2.3 depict the Theatre of Dionysus, the venue Athenians used from the fifth century BCE onwards for theatre performances and much else. The photo and ground plan of the remains today are difficult to interpret, because most of what you see was not yet in place in the fifth century but is a later addition. However, some fairly basic yet important aspects are obvious. Greek theatre was performed in the open air, with spectators sitting on seats fitted into the hillside (in a semicircle in the case of the Theatre of Dionysus), looking out on the countryside behind the theatre. The Theatre of Dionysus was very large compared to many theatres today: its capacity is estimated at a minimum of 10,000, perhaps even 20,000, spectators. Theatre in Athens was not an intimate affair.

The acting area in the centre is easier to see on the plan than in the photo. It was called the *orchēstra* and was probably round (though there is some evidence suggesting an originally



Figure 2.2 The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. Photo: Peter M. Wilson/Alamy. Almost all the remains are more recent than the fifth century BCE, but the basic shape, with seating (the *theatron*) on the hillside around a flat performance area (the *orchestra*), would have been similar. You may just about be able to make out the seats of honour with high backs between the orchestra and the bottom row of the ordinary seating.

rectangular shape). Later on, there was a raised stage for the individual actors, clearly divided from the *orchestra* used by the Chorus, but this raised stage was probably not yet constructed in the Classical period. There were entrances to the left and right of the *orchestra*. Behind the *orchestra*, there was a wooden construction sometimes referred to as the stage building (or *skēnē*, hence the English 'scene'), offering a further exit and a space for changing costumes and serving as a backdrop if required (e.g. as a house or, as you will see in the *Lysistrata*, as the entrance to the Acropolis). However, dating is again an issue. Many Greek plays clearly use such a building in various ways, as part of the play. Scholars are divided as to whether any such building was needed to perform *Persians*. As you heard on DVD2, Section 1, Oliver Taplin thinks it wasn't. If it *did* exist, I could for instance imagine the ghost of Darius appearing on its top, towering over the other actors.

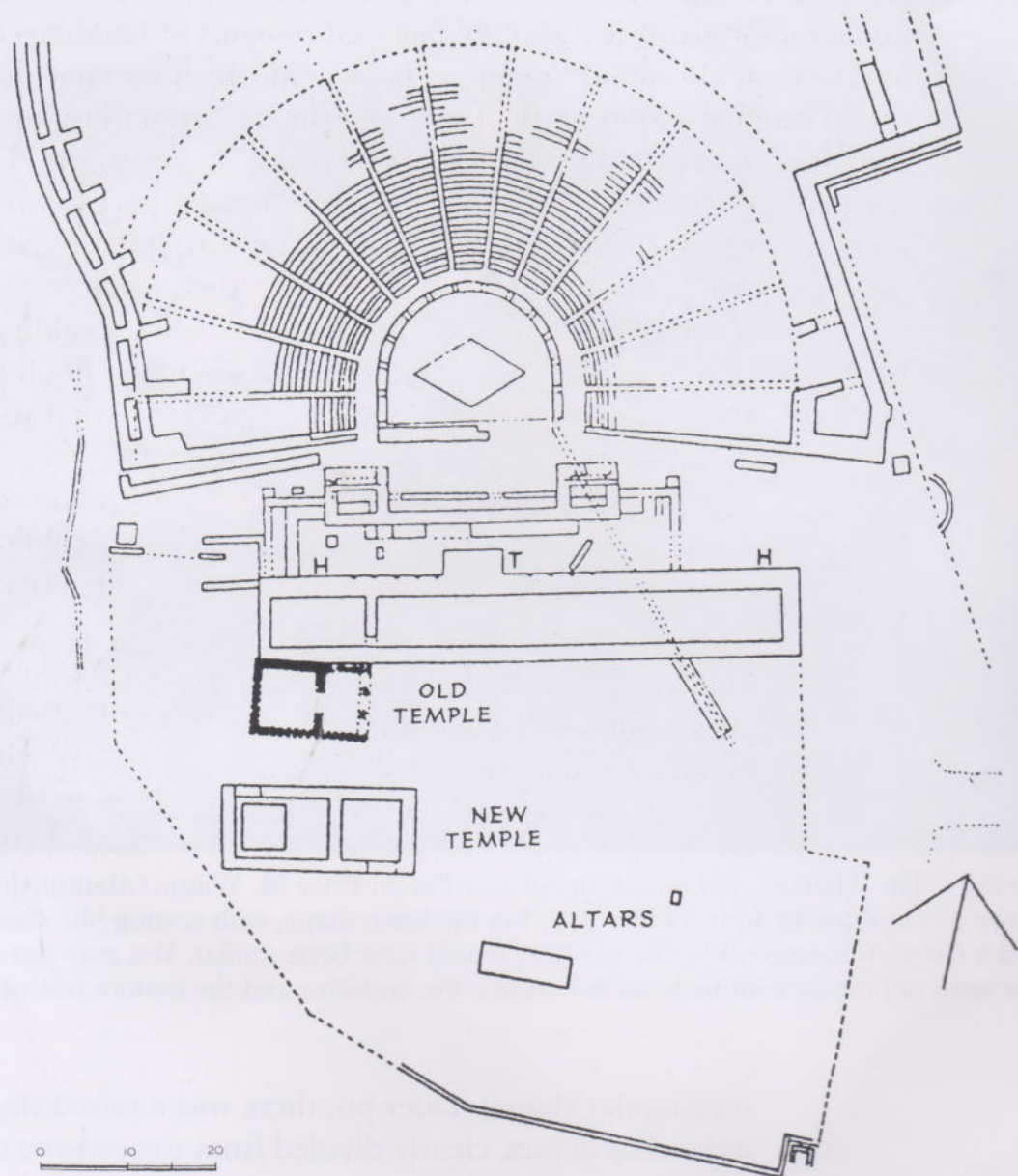


Figure 2.3 Ground plan of the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. Reproduced from R. Green & E. Handley, *Images of Greek Theatre*, 1995, London: British Museum Press. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum. Again, many of the remains indicated, including the stage building, are later than the fifth century BCE. The temples and altars belonging to the same precinct are reminders of the religious context in which theatre was performed at Athens.

Occasion and scheduling

Theatre performances in Athens were not daily evening events as in many cultures today. Rather, they usually took place at particular festivals, during the day. The two most prominent festivals with theatre performances are called the City (or Great) Dionysia (in contrast to the Rural Dionysia) and the Lenaea.

Both were festivals in honour of the god Dionysus, and both were marked by a number of activities, such as processions and public sacrifices. Theatrical performances were one of these activities, as were other kinds of performances, for example, choral dances. This festival context has two important implications for the role of theatre in Athenian society: theatre was a very public affair and it had a religious aspect. As you study *Persians* and the *Lysistrata* in this block, you will see that both the public and the religious nature of ancient theatre in general are reflected in the plays themselves.

Both City Dionysia and Lenaea took place only once a year. Plays were written specifically for these festivals and were performed only once. There were re-performances, especially outside Athens (as far away as Sicily in the case of *Persians*), but plays never went into repertoire in the sense of runs of regular performances in the same venue.

At both City Dionysia and Lenaea, more than one play was performed. The City Dionysia lasted several days, allowing for performances of three tragedies each by three authors (nine in total), as well as up to five comedies and three satyr plays (satyr plays are the type of ancient drama we know least about; you won't study them in this course). The Lenaea seems to have been an altogether smaller affair, but, at least at some point, it also featured both tragedies and comedies.

The three tragedies performed together at the City Dionysia were sometimes based on the same theme or even story. Unfortunately, we know little about the two plays performed with *Persians*, which makes it impossible to tell whether we should think of it as part of a larger whole.

Actors

All actors were male. A distinction was made between actors of individual roles and members of the chorus. Acting of individual roles, especially the big roles, was increasingly prestigious. A prize was awarded for the best actor from 449 BCE at the City Dionysia and from c.432 BCE at the Lenaea. By contrast, there were no prizes for the chorus members. Rather, the chorus was drafted mostly from Athenian youths. Apparently, acting in the chorus was a civic duty and an aspect of participation in public life.

All actors, both individual actors and the chorus, wore masks. You heard Oliver Taplin and Edith Hall discuss reasons for this

use of masks and possible effects for the audience. One of them is that the acting is likely to have been quite formal – as is suggested also by the great distance between spectators and actors. Costumes served to distinguish characters, perhaps more in terms of rank than in terms of personality. Barbarians, as you saw in DVD2, Section 1, were characterised by a particularly elaborate kind of costume (see Figure 2.4).



Figure 2.4 Nolan neck-amphora c.480 BCE. Greek warrior attacking a Persian archer; terracotta, height 34.8cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1906 (06.1021.117). Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The vase shows that Greeks imagined Persians as dressed in a particular style, not only in a theatre context. Note in particular the head-dress and trousers, both in contrast with the uniform of the Greek soldier.

For us today, perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind when reading a play is that many passages were sung and danced, to the accompaniment of an *aulos*, a wind instrument resembling two oboes played at the same time. Most choral passages were sung. Individual actors usually spoke rather than sang, but they too had songs (in *Persians*, Xerxes is an individual role that is sung rather than spoken, as one can work out from the metre in the original Greek). Today, many performances choose not to sing, since song is often associated with opera rather than drama. Similarly, you may have noticed that the performance CD doesn't contain singing, but that the director and composer tried to use music in some of the places which would have been sung in the original Greek (we started by trying to use music in *all* those places, but it turned out that this would have unduly constrained the composer in this particular case).

Audiences

This is another aspect of ancient drama we know less about than we would like to. In the first place, obviously, Athenian citizens formed a significant part of the audience. In a way, theatre assembled the citizenry just as more explicitly political institutions like the Assembly did. This is particularly important in plays like *Persians* which deal with recent political events, as you will see.

Next, some sources suggest that slaves and resident foreigners also came to the theatre, but there are doubts, in particular about the slaves (you heard Oliver Taplin say in DVD2, Section 1 that he doesn't think slaves went to the theatre). In addition, it appears that the City Dionysia, much more than the Lenaea, drew a significant number of non-Athenians, partly because it was a spring festival coinciding with the beginning of the sailing season: the time of year when the storms subsided and the sea became navigable.

The most difficult question concerning the audience is whether women were present. Women were not citizens in Athens or indeed elsewhere in ancient Greece or Rome (you will learn more about the way the women's domain was thought to be the home, and about their rather limited public roles, later in the block). It is unsurprising, therefore, that, to judge from the plays, they don't seem to be what one might call the target audience. But there is no firm evidence that permits us to conclude with certainty that they weren't allowed to come to the theatre. This question holds particular relevance for your study of the *Lysistrata*, a play in which most of the characters are women (but played by men, of course).

Reviews and prizes

Most important, as I just mentioned, there was a prize for the best actor. Even before this prize was instituted, and already at the time of *Persians*, there was another competition: the prize for the best poet. Dramatic performance in Athens was fiercely competitive. A complex voting system was in place, designed to minimise the risk of bribery and the exertion of influence.

Depending on the culture you live in or are familiar with, you may find the combination of religious festival, drama and prizes more or less difficult to make sense of. For the Athenians, it was obviously normal (see Figure 2.5). As you will learn from Lorna

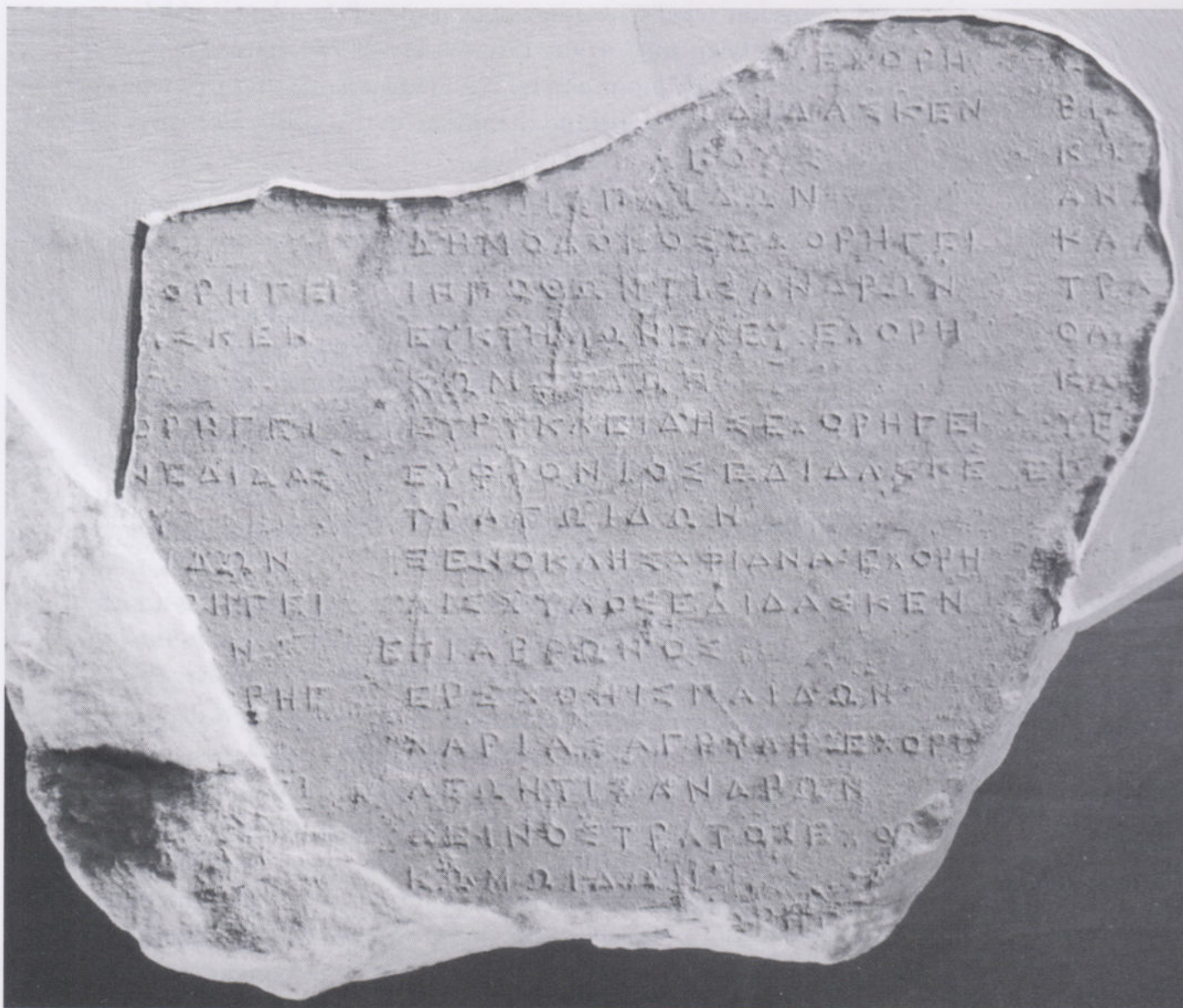


Figure 2.5 A marble inscription recording prize winners at the Great Dionysia. *Inscriptiones Graecae* II², 2318, Epigraphical Museum, Athens. © Ministry of Culture, Archaeological Receipts Fund. For each year, there are entries recording the victors in various competitions, including the playwrights of comedy and tragedy, with their *chorēgos*. The inscription was put up in the fourth century BCE, drawing on older records. It reflects the importance that was given to victories at the public festivals.

Hardwick's essay in Part 3 of this block, this combination should be seen as an aspect of the performance culture of ancient Athens.

Finance

We aren't exactly sure how theatre was financed in Athens. But what is certain is that the bulk of the cost was carried by the so-called *chorēgos*, or 'leader of the chorus'. Athens didn't have an income tax system. Instead, the richest men were expected periodically to finance major public projects: theatre performances were one of them; triremes (the warships used by the Athenians) were another. How exactly a *chorēgos* was appointed is a complicated subject. Perhaps the most important thing to note is that being a *chorēgos* wasn't just costly but also brought immense kudos. For instance, the *chorēgos* of the winning plays would often set up large dedications, effectively advertising himself. The *chorēgos* of Aeschylus' *Persians* was Pericles, who would later become one of Athens' most influential politicians and who you will encounter again later on in the block.

By way of conclusion to this exercise, I would like to emphasise something that will have emerged from the various issues you looked at, namely the sheer prominence of theatre in Athens. In all cultures, I suspect theatre is at one level entertainment. Certainly the Athenians would be the first to agree that going to the theatre was a pleasure. But more than that, theatre to them was an essential part of their political, social, intellectual and religious activities. Theatre was important.

Exercise

This exercise will bring you back to thinking about Aeschylus' choices in turning the Persian Wars into drama. It will also make you focus on tragedy only, rather than on all Athenian theatre. Below is another set of headings (in italics). For each of them, try to do two things:

- 1 Find out a few points about the normal practices and conventions of Athenian tragedy.
- 2 Think briefly about whether these practices and conventions may have influenced Aeschylus' choices.

Subject matter: What material did Athenian tragedy normally use for its plots?

Time and place: Where and when was Athenian tragedy normally set? Were there changes in place or ‘jumps’ in time in the course of the plays?

Number of actors: How many actors (as opposed to ‘how many roles’) were there in Greek tragedy?

Again, use the *OCCC* – especially ‘tragedy, Greek, I.4 “Form and performance” and I.5 “Subject-matter and interpretation”’. Some of the points Oliver Taplin and Edith Hall make in DVD2 should be helpful too. As before, don’t worry if you can’t find good material for each of the headers (I notice, for instance, that the *OCCC* has little to say on ‘time and place’) – you will get an overview in my discussion below.



Discussion

Again, I have used the same headings as you, drawing on the sources I recommended to you and adding further points.

Subject matter

If you knew nothing about Athenian tragedy before listening to *Persians*, you were probably in for a surprise when doing this exercise. *All* surviving tragedies, with the exception of *Persians*, were based on mythological subjects. Many of these subjects were in fact drawn from the Homeric epics, parts of which you studied earlier in the course. Still, we know of some other tragedies early in the fifth century BCE, even earlier than *Persians* in 472 BCE, that used historical material, but they don’t survive. So Aeschylus was not completely unusual in abandoning myth as subject matter. Perhaps even more important, I think, is that his decision to set the play in Persia, rather than Athens, goes some way towards introducing an element of the imaginary. Yes, his material is historical, but it is set in a distant country very few (if any) of the spectators would ever have been to. I discussed earlier the ‘special’ performance context created by the festival: tragic theatre is not part of ordinary life. The setting of *Persians*, just as much as a mythical setting, contributes further to this sense of the extraordinary and the far away. I will ask you to think more about this at a later stage.

Time and place

It is sometimes said that Greek tragedy obeyed rules about the 'unity' of time and place; in other words, playwrights were not allowed to change the scene in the course of the play, or to have plays cover more than one day of onstage action. In fact, there was no such rule. There are exceptions to both types of 'unity', for instance, in *Eumenides* (meaning 'Furies'), another play by Aeschylus. However, it is true that Greek tragedy tends to keep to one setting and to continuous action more than many later forms of theatre. No doubt theatre design has something to do with it. In a completely open theatre, with limited scope for marking changes of locale, and with no curtain, it is hard to show to spectators that time or scene have changed.

This should help you understand Aeschylus' choices of time and place in *Persians*. The important thing to realise is that these constraints did not produce 'primitive' theatre. You have already thought a little, and will soon think further, about the sophistication with which Aeschylus worked past and future into the play.

As for space, as Edith Hall implies at one stage in DVD2, Section 1, Aeschylus seems to have done something very subtle: when you listened to the play, where did you imagine it was set? The texts of ancient plays have hardly any stage directions (or rather, if they do, they have usually been added by a modern editor or translator, and are not original). As a result, we need to work out the setting from the characters' words. Clearly, we are in the Persian city of Susa, but where? The opening makes little reference to place: anywhere the Persian elders (the chorus) would be imagined to meet. Later there is a mysterious reference to 'sitting down in this ancient building' (140). It's very hard to work out what that means. Then we have the scene at the tomb (681–4). The tomb must always have been in sight, but it wasn't highlighted in the play, and I doubt the audience (without being told so) would have thought from the beginning that the elders met near the tomb of Darius. In the last scene, when Xerxes arrives (908), the tomb seems to be forgotten again. There is much uncertainty here. I think Aeschylus purposefully maintains a fairly fluid setting, avoiding explicit changes of scene but still accommodating and foregrounding different locales at different times. (This is of course ideal for an audio production like the one on the CD: radio drama habitually operates with vague

definitions of space, where objects and places exist as they are mentioned and then fade away.)

The Messenger's speech is also worth thinking about with regard to space. As in many other Greek tragedies, it is used to expand the space to far-flung places, in particular here to Salamis. You will get to think more about this in a little while.

Number of actors

Earlier on, I pointed you to the difference between actors and roles because much Greek theatre, unlike many other forms of theatre, tended to have actors change roles, often several times in the course of the play. The use of masks will have helped them in this. Early tragedies managed with just two actors in addition to the chorus, and you heard both Oliver Taplin and Edith Hall talk about reasons for this self-imposed constraint and about the way different actors may have specialised in different types of roles (see DVD2, Section 1). The earliest tragedies we have that need three actors were the three plays forming the *Oresteia* trilogy in 458 BCE, twenty years after *Persians*. The implication of this is that, in *Persians*, there can be only two actors on stage at any one time.

This explains the structure of many of the scenes, with monologues or dialogue between only two characters and a few exchanges with the Chorus. *Persians* therefore has a rather formal feel, compared to much modern drama, but also to later Greek drama, which you will notice when you study *Lysistrata*. But as in the case of the constraints on time and place, I think it is important not to think of this as simply primitive. First of all, comparing *Persians* to modern drama is to impose modern categories on it. Secondly, even within modern categories, *Persians* is anything other than primitive. Of course, adding the third actor (and eventually, at some point in the history of European theatre, giving up any limitations on numbers of actors) was a major innovation, bringing with itself new opportunities. On the other hand, though, all Greek tragedies, and especially those with only two actors like *Persians*, have a stylised quality that can be exciting in its own way. You will have your own views; to me there is immense dramatic power in the discipline and sparseness of the dialogue structure in *Persians*.

(The tragic chorus, incidentally, was made up of twelve, later fifteen, actors. This poses great problems to modern directors since speaking, let alone singing, in unison is unusual in many theatre traditions. As you may have noticed, the director of our CD made the decision to have just three Chorus members, and

to divide the lines between them rather than make them speak in unison. This is one of many problematic issues one needs to consider when presenting Greek tragedy to modern audiences.)

1.4 Structure and narrative in *Persians*

You have now looked at both the history that underlies *Persians* and the context of theatre in Athens in general. This should serve you as a solid foundation for looking at the play in more depth. You will start, in this section, by refining and consolidating some of the points about structure and narrative that have come out of your work on conventions, constraints and Aeschylus' choices. In the remaining sections, you will move on to the political and cultural aspects of the play.

Offstage events

As I said earlier, the onstage action of *Persians* (and many other Greek plays) is continuous. The stage is never empty, although twice the Chorus are alone, and the spectators are rarely asked to imagine time passing between different sections of the play. In other words, the time imagined to pass between the opening and the closing lines is not necessarily longer than the performance CD you have listened to – a good hour. Offstage action, by contrast, encompasses a wide range of events at different times, such as the battle of Salamis in the past and the battle of Plataea in the future. Since these offstage events play such a large role in the play, it will be useful to study them in a little more depth.

Exercise



To get a better sense of the way in which Aeschylus accommodates a wide-ranging and complex narrative into a play that is set in one place, and without gaps in the events on stage, carefully read the play (again). As you read, try to note down any significant chunks of reported offstage action (e.g. 9–64: the Chorus recall the departure of the army). You may want to distinguish between offstage action in the past, the future and perhaps even the present. Don't worry about short sections of just twenty lines or so, or about exactly where a passage starts (e.g. instead of 9–64, you might note down 1–64, or 1 to something else). The aim is simply to understand just how much of the play is taken up by reports of past and future action off stage. (Some notes to help you with obscure references are provided in the line commentary, printed after the play in Reading 2.1.)

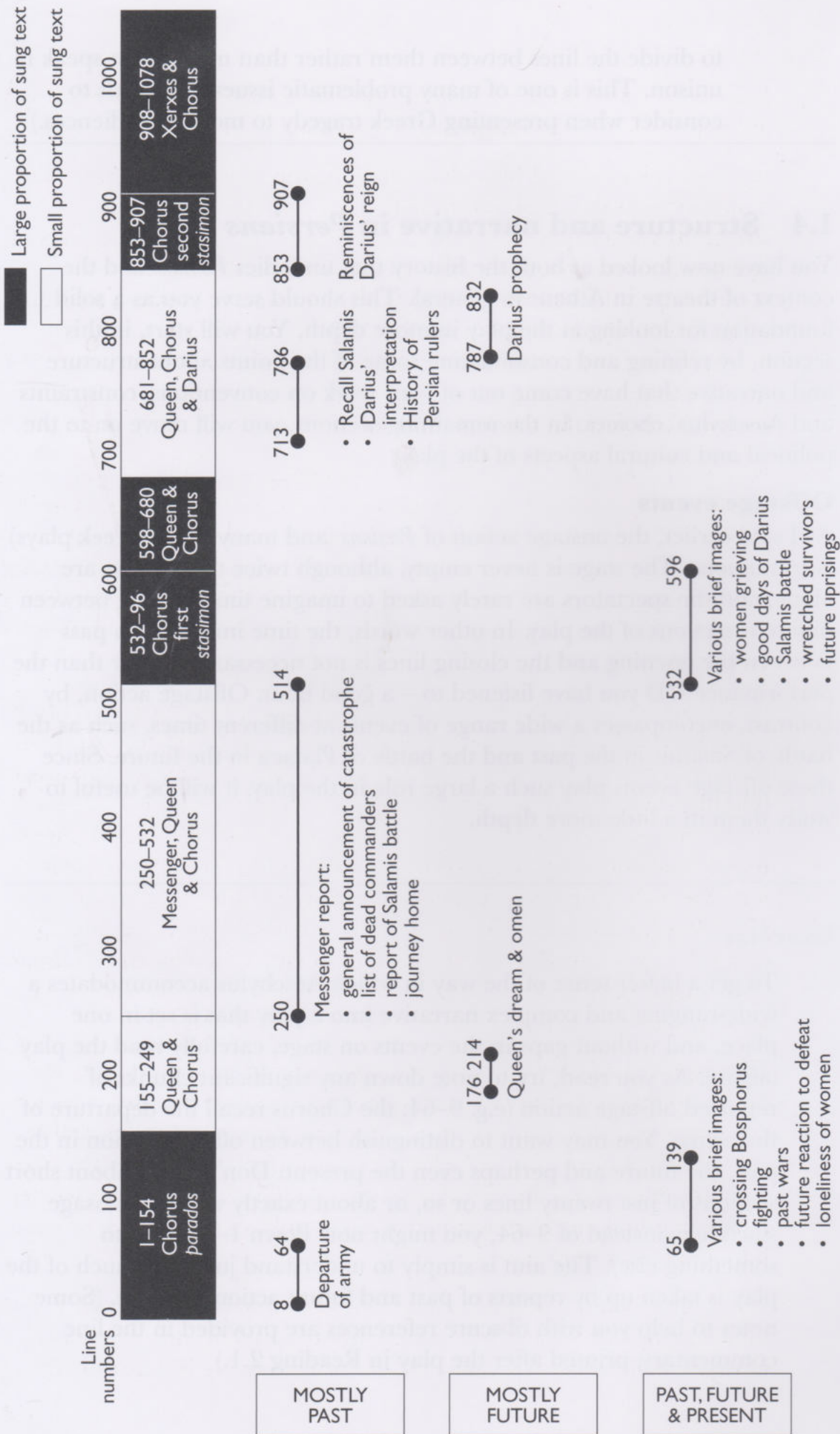


Figure 2.6 Past and present in the narrative of *Persians*. © The Open University.

Discussion

Look at my table on the previous page (Figure 2.6) – this is obviously a little more elaborate than what I suggested you do:

Let me explain what I have done here. At the top I have marked the major sections of the play. I think the divisions are reasonably straightforward (though it would be possible to suggest subdivisions of course). For the most part, they follow entries and exits: the first section is just the Chorus. At 155 the Queen enters, creating a second section, with Queen and Chorus. At 250 the Messenger enters, leading to a third section, with Messenger, Queen and Chorus. At 514 the Messenger exits and at 532 the Queen exits, leading to a fourth section, with just the Chorus. And so on.

For the choral passages I have noted down some technical vocabulary that you may already have come across if you have read about Greek tragedy. The *parodos* (in any Greek tragedy) is the song sung by the Chorus as they enter the performance space. And a *stasimon* is a choral song sung at any point during the play. *Persians* has two of them. There is no need for you to memorise these terms. I mention them so that you know what they mean when you see them elsewhere.

Below the bar with the main sections of the play, I have created three rows. I started with one row for offstage action in the past and one for offstage action in the future, but I found that there were some passages that blended past, future and present in such a way that I needed a third row for these. In fact, I found that in many cases I wasn't sure how to categorise a passage or where to start or end a passage. For instance, I didn't know whether the dream the Queen reports in 176–99 is 'future' (in so far as it is a prophecy of what is happening and will happen to Xerxes) or 'past' (in so far as she reports her dream of the night before). I am certain, therefore, that your list will vary in some respects from mine, and I don't think that matters.

However, the scheme – imprecise and subjective as it is – has its use. First, it shows just how much of the play is taken up by references to events offstage. Of course, most of these references are embedded in the action on stage, for example, the Chorus lamenting what they hear from the Messenger. But it remains notable that Aeschylus has written a play that looks at least as much at distant places at different times as it looks at Susa right now.

Next, the scheme brings out an interesting point about the past. Plays, unlike many novels, are in one sense always present: they are acted out now, before your eyes. But *Persians* is remarkable in this respect:

despite the real-time action on stage, much of the play is devoted to catching up with what has happened before. (It may be worth comparing the *Odyssey*, which starts with Telemachus on Ithaca, and then spends a lot of time narrating what has happened to Odysseus, before coming back to the events it started with.) The only lengthy passage not focused on offstage events is the last section – again there would be scope for comparison with the *Odyssey* – after Xerxes' entry. This may be simply to do with my interpretation of it: a case could be made for saying that Xerxes also has much to say about the past as he laments his catastrophe, and you may have classified the section that way. I haven't done so myself because I feel that the focus is more on lamenting Xerxes' and the Persians' *present* misery than on recalling the past. Again, any classification is necessarily crude. But what I would like to suggest to you is that the play – long stretches of which are taken up by reports of the past and future far away – culminates in a scene that focuses on the long-awaited king in front of the spectators' eyes. There is an important question here: is *Persians* about the catastrophe Xerxes and the Persians suffered in Greece, or about the reactions to the catastrophe that spectators watch in the course of the play?

Development

What we have so far, then, is a sophisticated plot, which in the confines of continuous stage time ranges across several events of the Persian Wars. Your next step in understanding Aeschylus' narrative is to look at the way the play develops. As I said before, some people have called *Persians* static, and it is undeniable that certain *kinds* of dynamics are clearly absent from the play. For instance, there is relatively little suspense about what will happen; characters don't have to confront difficult questions about what they should do, as is the case in many Greek tragedies; and there are few changes in personal fortune, another characteristic of many tragedies, since we see Xerxes only once he is a broken man. So we have to look elsewhere to understand how the play develops.

Exercise

Persians has relatively little action. Much of the play is taken up by characters thinking about and narrating what has happened. This raises a question. In what sense, if any, is there a *progression* from 1 to 1078? Is there anything that drives the play along? I should say that

this is quite an open-ended exercise, on which you could spend a lot of time. However, for our purposes here, it will be enough if you jot down two or three points that strike you as particularly important.

Discussion

The question is genuinely difficult, and permits more than one answer. I will give you mine. Yours may be different, which needn't mean that it is less valid, as long as you can give reasons to support your argument from the text. *Persians* is in many ways different from most plays performed today, at least in the countries that I know well. Thinking about what it is that drives the play is one way of realising and coming to terms with these differences.

My own answer is to do with perspectives and moods. I would divide *Persians* into four parts. Each part is characterised by a different perspective on Xerxes and his war against the Greeks, and hence by a different mood.

- 1 The play opens with the Chorus, soon joined by the Queen (1–245). Neither of them knows for sure what is happening in the war, but both are worried. There is a sense of anxiety and foreboding.
- 2 Then the Messenger comes from the battle scene; he is an eye witness, somebody who doesn't just fear but somebody who knows. As he reports the latest events, he brings the certainty of defeat (246–531). The mood is one of disaster and fulfilment of expectations. Interestingly, the play is only half over.
- 3 The Queen invokes her late husband, and Xerxes' father, Darius (598–851). Darius is an even more authoritative figure than the Messenger: he is not just an eye witness but, coming from the realm of the dead, he has superhuman knowledge. Darius goes further: he focuses on the future, prophesying the Persian defeat at Plataea (787–820). More importantly, he also speaks at length about causes. Where less authoritative characters (the Messenger, the Chorus and the Queen) had all at times speculated vaguely about divine envy of Persian wealth or the mysterious divine will, and were anxious about the daring crossing of the Bosphorus (or Bosporos, as it is spelt in the translation in Reading 2.1), Darius is more explicit. He confirms that 'closing up the Bosporos' was wrong (723–6), he speaks about Zeus 'chastising arrogant minds' (827–31) and, perhaps most important, he uses the strong word 'hubris' for the destruction of Greek temples by the Persian army

and forecasts sufferings and death in requital (807–15). So this is a scene of understanding and of reflection about causes. Until this scene, we were in no position – perhaps we weren’t even really asked – to think in any detail about why things happened the way they did. Now we are. (Should you read further Greek tragedies at some point in the future, there is an important lesson here. Don’t think just about why things happen – for example, why Oedipus suffered the way he did – but also about *when* and *how* the play makes you think about it. Greek tragedies are often very slippery in their suggestions about causes.)

- 4 Finally, Xerxes himself comes on stage. Together with the Chorus, he laments what has happened, to him and to the Persians as a whole (908–1078).

The point I want to make is this: *Persians* gives the audience a set of different perspectives on the events (in the order of Chorus, Queen, Messenger, Darius, Xerxes) and, correspondingly, creates a set of different moods (anxiety, certainty of disaster, reflection, lament). Much of the dynamics of *Persians* I suggest lies not, for example, in suspense or character study but, at least partly, in this sequencing. However, I should say again that this is very much a personal view.

The chorus

You may have noticed that the line numbers I gave you in the last bit of discussion had ‘gaps’ between my second and third sections (532–97), and my third and fourth sections (852–907). You may also have noticed that these ‘gaps’ are in fact not gaps but choral odes (*stasima*; the singular is *stasimon*). So it is high time to look at the chorus in a little more detail.

In Section 1.3, you learned about the chorus as a central element of all Athenian plays in the fifth century BCE. Far beyond their role in a play, choruses were an important aspect of social and religious activity throughout Archaic and Classical Greece. Many, perhaps even most, Greeks danced and sang in choruses at some point in their lives, usually as boys or girls, or young men or women, though it appears that in fifth-century Athens, exceptionally, choruses may have been a largely male prerogative. Choruses danced at many different occasions, often festivals and usually in honour of a god, such as Dionysus in the case of drama. Participating in choruses was a way of expressing that you were part of the community and was an aspect of your divine worship. (You will read further about the importance of all kinds of public performances in Greece in Lorna Hardwick’s essay, ‘Performance, competition and democracy in Athenian culture’, which you will be referred to later in this block.)

Choruses *embedded in plays* had an additional dimension. They, too, would have been perceived as expressions of community life and worship, even though it is difficult for us today to be sure about details. But in addition they were characters in the play, often belonging to a marginalised group such as women, slaves or old men – old men of Susa in the case of *Persians*. In fact, many Greek plays take their name from the identity of the chorus. *Persians* is a case in point, but there are more: *Suppliant Women*, *Eumenides*, *Acharnians*, *Birds*, and so on.

Exercise

What do you think is the function of the chorus in *Persians*? Note down a few points about its contribution to the play as a whole.

Discussion

In the light of your previous exercise, two things spring to mind to start with. First, the choral odes structure the play. In the section on 'Development' above, I suggested that one might divide *Persians* into four sections. Two of the three divisions are marked by a choral ode, and in fact you could use the absence of a choral ode between my first and second sections as an argument against my divisions. In some ways, comparable structures can be found in all Greek plays, including (as you will see) *Lysistrata*. Secondly, the chorus are not just a structuring device but also a character – or, if you like, a set of characters. They alone are on stage throughout; they therefore play an important role in the changes of mood that I have outlined. They open the play, expressing their anxiety; they then comment on the Messenger's disastrous news and Darius' even more disastrous prophecies and explanations; and finally they participate in Xerxes' closing lamentations. Throughout, they are loyal to Xerxes and his family, thus providing a sympathetic listener and respondent to all characters in the play.

So far so good. A potential problem with my discussion in the last paragraph is that you could read it as follows: 'The chorus are a somewhat embarrassing feature of Greek plays (perhaps one that survives from earlier days). If we try, we can find some reasons for their existence: they interrupt and structure the play and they sometimes behave like a normal character. Still, this is mostly special pleading; by and large life would be easier

without them.’ This is a caricature of a standard reaction to choruses by many of those (including me) who are used to theatre mostly without choruses. If your background is in African rather than European drama, or if you think of seventeenth- or eighteenth-century European opera, you will probably not find this a natural reaction, since choruses are important in many works that you know. But any modern production of a Greek play, whether on stage or for audio, faces difficult decisions about the chorus.

In response to this reaction I would ask you to do the following. As an experiment, turn your priorities upside down. Rather than assuming that the ‘basic play’ is the story acted out by the individual actors, with interruptions by the Chorus, imagine that what Athenians really went to see was a set of choral performances, with a bit of dialogue between actors written to link them – comparable perhaps to some operas in which recitative and spoken passages might sometimes be seen as getting you from one aria to the next. In defence of this experiment, I could point to the religious and social significance of the Chorus or to the elaborate performance style: a group of people singing and dancing rather than a few individuals speaking, or at best chanting. In the case of *Persians*, I would point out that many of the choral songs in the play resonate with choral song outside drama: the Chorus’ great dirge after the Messenger’s speech (532–96), their invocation of Darius, and their lament alongside Xerxes, will all have tapped the spectators’ wealth of experience and memories of cult practices. Not that they would have been simply cult songs transferred onto the stage: neither raising ghosts nor extensive lamentation by men (as opposed to women) was normal practice in fifth-century BCE Athens. But through evocation of certain elements of cult such as songs about the dead or laments for the dead, the Chorus would have had a kind of emotional and religious charge that normal dialogue could not have achieved.

Obviously, my suggested experiment goes a little too far; clearly, the dialogue between individual characters does more than get us from one choral ode to the next. But I am not sure which is further from the truth: the caricature of the modern European attitude to the chorus, or my experiment. Therefore, what I would urge you to do, as you study *Persians* or any other Greek play, is to recall this experiment once in a while. It is a healthy antidote against many modern European preconceptions.

1.5 Greeks and Persians

I have said a few times that *Persians* is a play about Xerxes and the Persian Wars. This is the story it tells, and you have studied some of the techniques Aeschylus uses in narrating this story in the form of a play. To Aeschylus’ audience a few years after the momentous battles of Salamis and Plataea, of course, this was not just any story but the story of a recent war threatening

their existence. In other words, it was a highly emotive and highly ideological story. Inevitably, this ideological charge can be felt throughout *Persians*. Consequently, in Sections 1.5 and 1.6, you will be studying *Persians* as an *ideological* play. In this section (1.5), you will look at the way *Persians* portrays the Greeks and their opponents, the Persians. In the next section (1.6), you will then add the historical dimension of the years *after* Xerxes' invasion (479 BCE until the performance of *Persians* in 472 BCE), to ground your reading not just in recent but also in contemporary history.

Greeks and Persians, then. Arguably, any major war is accompanied by much writing, thinking and talking about 'us' and 'them'. Everyone will think of different examples, but examples will never be difficult to find. This 'us' and 'them' distinction takes many different forms, from the banal to the sophisticated. The message can be delivered openly in newspaper headlines, or it can be delivered subtly through insinuation, jokes or even silence. Sometimes we notice it, sometimes we don't. But some oppositions between us and our enemy are likely to be propagated and discussed. Wars, in other words, bring to the fore questions of identity – our own and that of the other side. Such questions of identity have attracted wide interest not just in public debates generally, but also in Classical scholarship. Later in the block you will read James Robson's essay, 'Self and society in Classical Athens', which discusses several issues relating to this topic. But for now, I ask you to focus on *Persians*.

In Section 1.2, you thought a little about the remarkable choice Aeschylus made in setting his story in Persia, with only Persian characters. At the most obvious level, therefore, the play takes a Persian perspective. Nonetheless, I would suspect you felt that, to put it quite crudely, the Greeks seem to get a better press than the Persians. This is certainly the consensus of recent discussions of the play. You don't have to scratch far below the Persian surface to uncover a thoroughly Athenian core.

Exercise

Reflect on some of the ways in which *Persians* takes an Athenian viewpoint. What techniques does Aeschylus use to establish the Persians as not just different from but inferior to the Greeks? My discussion will focus on particular attributes and ways of behaviour that the play suggests are characteristic of the Persians as opposed to the Greeks. As ever, you may wish to jot down some key points. Try to note down only what you regard as major, repeated issues – there is no need for you to go through the play again line by line.

Discussion

There is much to be said on this. Edith Hall, who not only produced the translation you use but also pioneered work on questions of identity in Greek tragedy, devotes 25 pages of her book *Inventing the Barbarian* (Hall, 1989, pp.76–100) to *Persians*. Drawing on Hall's discussion, I will pick out just a few themes that strike me as particularly important. You may also discover the odd point that has already come up in DVD2, Section 1.

Luxury

You have already learned in DVD2, Section 1 that the Persians in the play (in contrast to real life) would have worn particularly ornate dress, with an elaborate head-dress. Dress is a very important means of characterising people in a play, exactly because it tends to stay with them throughout. During every minute of the play, spectators would have seen the Persians as dressed differently from themselves, and not just differently but also more elaborately.

Many passages in the play make it clear that hand in hand with this elaborate dress goes a sense of great luxury. Already in line 3, the Chorus describe themselves as guardians of the sumptuous palace, rich in gold. This theme continues. The Persians are phenomenally wealthy. For instance, there is the 'gold-bedecked army' (11), the 'gold of Sardis' (45) and 'Babylon rich in gold' (53). The Queen first 'enters in great pomp on a chariot', as Edith Hall puts it in the stage direction she added after 154 (remember: the ancient text doesn't have stage directions). Hall's stage direction is based on a later passage, 607–8. In those lines the Queen describes her own *second* entrance (after the scene with the Messenger) as 'without the chariot and finery I had before'. This allows us to deduce earlier pomp; moreover, it is also one of the devices Aeschylus uses to show visually that the Persians are losing. The Queen can no longer display her wealth. Xerxes himself enters in rags (after 907), and Darius says that wealth is no use for the dead (841–2).

Not only does wealth fail to protect the Persians, it is also associated with decadence. At several points in the play, Aeschylus uses the word *habros*, which means 'soft, luxuriant, decadent', with shades even of 'effeminate'. Since it is hard to detect in the translation, let me list all its occurrences here: Lydians 'who live in luxury' (41–2), 'softly grieving' women (135), 'softly wailing' women (541), 'soft sheets' (543) and the softly

treading Chorus (1073) are all translations of phrases involving *habros*. They are all means of characterising the Persians as decadent.

Masculine v. feminine

Throughout the play, there is an underlying contrast of masculine Greeks v. feminine Persians. The character we see the most of is the Persian Queen. The King by contrast is absent. More generally, several characters in the play lament the fact that the young men of Persia have died in the war against Greece: Susa is 'emptied of men' (118 and 730), Persian wives are left 'without husbands' (289) and houses are 'deprived of a man' (580). By contrast, we hear nothing about Greek women, just Greek (male) soldiers. None of this amounts to evidence for the Persians, unlike the Greeks, being a nation of women, but it does give Persia more feminine *associations* than Greece.

What is more, the Persian men behave in some ways like women. I have already pointed to the effeminate associations of *habros*. Beyond that, the most obvious expression of the femininity of Persian males comes in the final scene. Xerxes arrives at last, and behaves in some ways like the ancient stereotype of a woman rather than a man. He tears his clothes and indulges in extensive lament, together with the Chorus. In ancient Greek culture, this sort of lament was the role of women. They would lament their dead with various kinds of ritual, involving song and gestures, such as tearing of clothes. In *Persians* it is men who are lamenting, bringing to a climax the theme of the feminine Persians.

Freedom v. servitude

The Athenians saw the wars against Persia as a struggle for freedom, and Aeschylus' *Persians* is one of many texts in which they expressed this struggle. I will give you two relevant passages (there are more). First, already in 49–50, the Persians (described here as 'inhabitants of sacred Tmolos') 'are set on casting the yoke of slavery onto Greece'. Secondly, the Messenger reports the Greek rallying cry in the battle at Salamis (401–6): 'O sons of the Greeks, come on, liberate your fatherland, liberate your children, your wives, the shrines of your ancestral gods and the graves of your forefathers. Our struggle now is on behalf of them all.'

But Aeschylus goes further than this. He also portrays the Greeks as 'free' and the Persians as almost 'slaves' in their internal politics and their way of life. Again, I will give you a few examples. The Chorus submit to authority with little or no questioning throughout the play. A visual expression of that is

their prostration at the Queen's first entry (152). The Greeks regarded prostration before human beings as alien and a sign of servitude. Xerxes appears not to be 'accountable to the community'. These are the words of the Queen at 213–14, which find some confirmation when the Messenger reports (370–2) that Xerxes was planning his escape from the battle while the punishment for deserters was beheading (to be fair, Xerxes accepts some responsibility when he arrives on stage in the end). Correspondingly, Persian subjects do not have freedom of speech: when thinking about the consequences of the defeat, the Chorus imagine that 'men will no longer curb their tongues; for people are released to talk freely when a strong yoke has been removed' (591–4).

In contrast, there are no absolute rulers in Athens (in fact, their leaders aren't even named in the play). This is made particularly clear in the short dialogue in which the Messenger tells the Queen about Athens (232–45). Athens is powerful and a leader of Greece, but not because of some 'sole commander of the army', as the Queen expects, typical Persian that she is. Rather, 'they are called neither the slaves nor subjects of any single man' (242). In other words, Athens – unlike Persia – is a democracy.

I could extend this list, and I suspect that you have noted down several other ways of characterising the Persians as different from the Greeks, but I think the point is clear. Therefore, I would just like to make three general observations. The first concerns Greek and Persian identities. You may have noticed that I phrased two of the three topics I discussed as '*A v. B*'. This is not an accident. Rather, it seems that Aeschylus – in line with a widespread fifth-century BCE Greek tendency to think about the world in terms of polarities – created oppositions. Greeks and Persians are opposites. Despite the seemingly Persian perspective, the Persians are at times not so much portrayed as Persians as they are portrayed as *not Greeks*. On the one hand, yes, they have some specific characteristics of their own: for example, they live in Persia; they have Persian-sounding names (whether real or made up); their Persian-looking costumes may or may not have resembled real Persian dress; and their kings may indeed have enjoyed a degree of splendour not known in Athens. On the other hand, they also have characteristics that seem to be invented simply as an opposite to the way the Greeks wanted to see themselves. The word 'barbarian' underlines the point. Several times in the play, the Persians are called barbarians. Barbarians are not one particular ethnic group or nation: they are 'anything but Greeks'. The point to notice here is that, in *Persians*, the

Persians sometimes come to stand for any non-Greek people. They are simply 'barbarians', or as scholars sometimes put it, they are 'other', that is, other than Greek. At least at times, they are 'them' as opposed to 'us', rather than a particular nation in whose particular lives one takes an interest. In those moments they tend to be inferior to 'us'.

In this respect, *Persians* is an immensely influential piece of writing. It is one of the earliest (perhaps *the* earliest) of many European works portraying the East as in various ways inferior to the West. Unsurprisingly, as Edith Hall says in DVD2, Section 1, the play was later revived at various key moments of conflict between East and West, such as the battle of Lepanto in 1571 and the Iraq War in 1993. If you are interested in this European (and later also American) tendency of characterising the East as inferior, you may want to have a look at Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1995). Said uses *Persians* as a key text in his far-reaching argument about western constructions of the East over many centuries.

My second observation is about methods of studying plays. Already in your study of Homer, you have practised your skills in close textual analysis. Following on from that, in my discussion here I have also made a point of focusing closely on the text. Many general observations we make about literary texts are ultimately based on small details of the text. Therefore, close attention to these details is an essential skill in literary analysis. A further exercise centred on this skill will follow shortly (in Section 1.7).

However – and this is my third observation – words are not everything. When you work from a written text, or even from a CD, you will inevitably focus on what the characters say. Much of my discussion, and I suspect of your own notes, has been focused on words. But you will have noticed that many of the verbal themes go together with aspects of stage action: the Persian dress, the Queen's splendour, the Chorus' prostration before the Queen, Xerxes' torn clothes. As I mentioned before, the lesson here is always to think about the possible ways of performing a play while you are reading it. You will get plenty of scope for thinking about performance when working on the *Lysistrata*.

To put Aeschylus' portrayal of the Persians in perspective, it is interesting to compare the play with the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* also portrays a war between Greeks and non-Greeks: the Trojans. But, for the most part, the Trojans are not treated particularly differently from the Greeks (Chris Emlyn-Jones spoke very briefly about this in Block 1, Section 5.1). Like the Greeks, they have outstanding fighters as well as general troops; like the Greeks, they have strong and less strong leaders. And as for the word 'barbarian', it occurs only once, at *Iliad* 2.867, referring to language. Lattimore translates it as 'of the outland speech'. The tone isn't disparaging.

So, in general, the Trojans of the *Iliad* are no worse than the Greeks. Beyond this general point, though, there is some room for disagreement. You may, for instance, point to Paris, who at times is ‘womanly’. Is Paris a prototype for Aeschylus’ Persians? A matter of judgement, no doubt. But the overriding difference between Homer and Aeschylus is clear. Edith Hall’s title *Inventing the Barbarian* is appropriate in two ways. First, as you just saw, Aeschylus exaggerated, perhaps at times even invented, Persian characteristics so as to provide a contrast to Greek characteristics. Secondly, the comparison with Homer suggests that Aeschylus gave the term ‘barbarian’ a negative connotation it didn’t have before. As you will see later, Aeschylus is not alone in this but reflects a trend of his time. It appears that among Athenians the experience of the Persian Wars contributed to a more aggressive construction of polarised identities: self and other, them and us, Greeks and barbarians. However, as you will see shortly, this shouldn’t be taken too far. To say that the Athenians constructed polarities isn’t to say that they saw the Persians *just* as the polar opposite to themselves.

1.6 Historical and cultural context

In the previous section, you thought about Aeschylus’ construction of Greek and Persian identities in the wake of the Persian Wars. There can’t be any doubt that the Persian Wars were still fresh in the minds of his audience in 472 BCE. Many would have had first-hand experience or would have lost relatives and friends in battle. None the less, almost ten years had passed by, and inevitably his play will have been shaped by those years, too. They are therefore the topic of this section.

Exercise

Read the account of the aftermath of the Persian Wars in *BHAG* (pp.138–42). What aspects of the history of this period strike you as particularly relevant to Aeschylus’ choice and treatment of his topic? As before, add to your timeline events that strike you as significant.



Discussion

The first thing I would stress is that it is misleading to think (as I may have implied until now) that the Persian Wars stopped after Xerxes’ defeat. *BHAG*’s account shows that fighting continued in the 470s and 460s BCE (e.g. victories at Eion in 476 BCE and at the Eurymedon

River in c.467 BCE). No doubt the Persians were not simply a thing of the past. They were no longer the same threat they were before Salamis and Plataea, but a threat they still were. Even at home in Athens, there was a physical reminder of the earlier battles. As you will see in the section on the Acropolis, the burnt temples on the Acropolis weren't rebuilt until later. In addition, the increasing ambitions of Athens are important. The foundation of the Delian league in 477 BCE and the increasing tensions with the member states as well as rivalries with Sparta will all have been discussed in Athens. Athenian history in the second half of the fifth century BCE was dominated by conflict not with Persia but with Sparta, and both Athens and Sparta tried to achieve alliances with Persia to help them in their intra-Greek conflict. In fact, the victory over the Persians at Salamis became a cornerstone in Athenian propaganda against the Spartans. If Greece, the Athenians argued, had only had the Spartans to rely on for its defence, the Persians would have overrun much or all of it. (If you have time you may like to think about Aeschylus' portrayal of Salamis in this respect: an Athenian or a Greek victory?)

Therefore, what I would like to suggest to you is this: *Persians* was inspired by the momentous events and indeed the lasting destruction of Xerxes' invasion. But, at the same time, the play should be seen in its contemporary context: the context of a continuous threat from Persia; increasing Athenian attempts to dominate other Greek states; and an increasing need for Athens to justify the predominance it tried to achieve. In this contemporary context, *Persians* does not simply serve to remember the past. It also serves to engage with the present.

Aeschylus, of course, was not the only author writing in the 470s or 460s BCE under the influence of recent history. There were others, and there were also painters, sculptors, architects and so on. A quick look at some of their works will help us put *Persians* in context.

I have selected three such works:

- An short poem ('epigram'), later attributed to the poet Simonides, and dated c.476 BCE, commemorating the capture of the city of Eion. It was preserved in a later quotation but originally inscribed in Athens in the marketplace (the *agora*):

They too were of steadfast heart who once at Eion on the waters of the Strymon subjected the sons of the Medes to fiery hunger and chilling Ares and were the first to discover the helplessness of the enemy.

(Simonides (attrib.), Epigram XL(b), in Campbell, (trans.) 1991, p.557)

- An Athenian vase, dated c.460 BCE, possibly commemorating the battle of the Eurymedon River (see Illustrations Book, Plates 1 and 2).
- The *Stoa Poikilē* (a painted colonnade) in Athens, dated c.460 BCE. This isn't preserved itself, but we have a description by the second-century CE writer Pausanias (see Reading 2.2).



Exercise

Start by finding out some context. You learned very briefly about events at Eion and the Eurymedon in Section 1.6. If necessary, you may want to refresh your memory of when they took place and who won; you could also look up Eurymedon on the map of the course website (Eion isn't shown here, but was situated near the mouth of the Strymon River, which is shown).



The *Stoa Poikilē* is one of several important buildings around the Athenian *agora*. You can read about the *agora* in the *OCCC* under 'Athens (topography)', but there is very little on the *Stoa Poikilē*. A *stoa* is a colonnade, and could have various functions. In the fifth century BCE, *stoai* (the plural) were used both for administrative purposes and as memorials. *Poikilē* means 'colourful', and describes this particular *stoa* exactly because of the paintings we are interested in here. If you have spare time you may also wish to look up 'Simonides', 'epigram, Greek, Archaic and Classical', and 'Pausanias' in the *OCCC*, but this isn't crucial.



Once you have a rough understanding of the context (which you shouldn't spend much time on), reflect on differences and similarities between these three works and Aeschylus in their portrayal of the conflict between Greeks and Persians. As in other texts you have read, you will encounter some names you don't know. There is no need to follow them up. A basic grasp of the texts and the image are sufficient for our purposes here.

Discussion

First of all – and perhaps the most important point altogether – is the sheer fact that *Persians* isn't alone. The Greeks in general, and the Athenians in particular, went to great lengths to commemorate the Persian Wars. More than that, they celebrated their victory in these wars. In all three examples, the Greeks or Athenians seem to be

triumphant, though the Eurymedon vase isn't explicit about it, something I will come back to shortly.

Beyond that, similarities are more elusive. The most important question for our purposes is whether the *Persians* are characterised as in any sense inferior. This is where we need to look at the works individually.

Let's start with the Eion epigram. Inscribed in the *agora*, it is a very public form of commemoration, just like *Persians* itself. But of course it is much more succinct. It names the place (Eion on the Strymon – the river in which many Persians die in Aeschylus' play, perhaps not a coincidence) and it makes it clear that the Athenians won. But that is pretty much it. The only word worth pressing perhaps is the 'helplessness' of the enemy that the Athenians 'discovered'. Helplessness just in this battle or a more general sign of inferiority? Your judgement.

Let's move on to the other public monument, also erected in the *agora*: the painting in the *Stoa Poikilē*. It is close to impossible to work out from Pausanias' description what sort of painting we should imagine, and many of the details are problematic, but fortunately the general themes are perhaps what matters most to us here. There seem to have been four battles:

- Athenians v. Lacedaemonians (=Spartans)
- Athenians v. Amazons
- Greeks v. Trojans
- Greeks v. Persians (at Marathon)

Were the Persians inferior? They are evenly matched in some parts and in flight in others. This again shows Greek superiority, but it's impossible to tell whether the Persians were displayed as inferior fighters as such, or whether they just happened to lose this particular battle. Pausanias calls them barbarians, just as Aeschylus does, but that probably says more about Pausanias (who lived hundreds of years later) than about the painter. What is most interesting perhaps is the parallelism between the four paintings: the Athenians/Greeks defeating the enemy. This suggests comparisons between the various defeated enemies: the Spartans (who more and more became Athens' chief rival, as you will see later in the block, though we know nothing about this particular battle, unfortunately); the Amazons, those one-breasted women of myth who were said to have besieged Athens in the distant past; the Trojans; and the Persians. This clearly

characterises the Persians as an arch-enemy. And in so far as they are seen alongside the Amazons – aggressors and women who don't behave as women should behave – they are clearly despicable. But how far should we press this? Again you will have to make up your own mind.

Finally, the vase. This is more private art, as vases like this would have been used to pour wine at parties, but the heavily ideological character is clear. A Greek male holds his penis and runs towards a Persian who is bending over – the Persian seems to be imagined as speaking the words inscribed on the vase: 'I'm Eurymedon. I stand bent over.' As in *Persians*, the figure wears a special costume and special head-gear, but what does it all mean? The most likely interpretation seems to be that the Persian man is ready to submit to anal penetration by the Athenian, starkly symbolising Athenian superiority and, in Greek views of homosexuality, perhaps even Persian effeminacy (though that's debatable). The inscription seems to suggest that the vase commemorates the Eurymedon victory. Unlike the other two examples, this one isn't explicit and not all scholars agree with this interpretation. Yet in so far as it is a commemoration of this battle, it is far more aggressive in its portrayal of Persian inferiority than the Eion epigram and, from what Pausanias tells us, the *Stoa Poikilē* painting. In this respect, it is most closely reminiscent of *Persians*.

Let me summarise Sections 1.5 and 1.6 so far. In response to the enormous threat posed by the Persian invasion, the relief of the various victories and the continuous stream of battles with the Persians, Athenians in the 470s and 460s BCE created a number of works of art commemorating this conflict. Such commemorations tended to celebrate Athenian superiority, at times couching it aggressively in terms of polarity between Greeks and others. This polarity is not so much based on any knowledge of matters Persian as on the desire to express Greek superiority. This seems clear-cut, and to a degree is clear-cut. Still, it can't be left quite like this. To round off your study of these issues, I'd like to introduce an important element of uncertainty. This uncertainty concerns the issue of cultural exchange: is it really true that the Athenians knew nothing about the Persians and simply invented stereotypes for them? Until a few years ago, most scholars would have answered the question with a resounding yes, but now the consensus is weakening. Future research will show whether it will disappear altogether.

Exercise

I'd like you to look at a set of three sources, all suggesting a degree of exchange between Greeks and Persians. Two of them are taken from Herodotus, a historian who was born in Asia Minor but who wrote in Athens in the second half of the fifth century BCE, at least twenty years after the *Persians*, probably more. The third passage comes from Thucydides, a historian also writing in Athens, a little later than Herodotus; you will study longer sections of his work later in the block. There are questions about the reliability of all three sources, especially the two Herodotus passages. For our purposes here, though, I would like to avoid this thorny issue. In different ways, all three passages suggest that, contrary to what I have said so far, there was some kind of mutual exchange and knowledge between Greeks (Athenian and otherwise) and Persians. Even if not everything in these three passages is historical fact, they are at least an expression of what Herodotus and Thucydides *believed* was historical fact. And perhaps that's good enough for us right now. All that I am interested in here is that there was a certain degree of exchange between Greeks and Persians, even if I can't be sure about all the details.

Now read the three passages indicated below. Ask yourself what kind of effect, if any, the things they say about exchanges between Greeks and Persians has on your reading of *Persians*. As ever, if you are interested, do look up the ancient authors in question – Herodotus and Thucydides – in the *OCCC*, but it isn't crucial for this exercise.



- Herodotus 7.43 (Reading 2.3). Herodotus is narrating Xerxes' invasion of Greece, the invasion that ends at Salamis. Xerxes is still in Asia Minor, reaching Troy. (As usual, don't worry about names you don't know.)



- Herodotus 7.150–1 (Reading 2.4). One of the Greek cities that refused to join the alliance against Persia was Argos (it was never allowed to forget that). Herodotus gives various accounts of the reasons for the city's refusal. This is one of them.
- Thucydides 1.130. Thucydides is narrating the events that eventually led the Spartans in c.470 BCE to kill their fellow Spartan Pausanias, commander of the Greek forces at Plataea and later on. (Note: he is nothing to do with the Pausanias who wrote the description of the *Stoa Poikilē*.) One issue was Pausanias' alleged treason. Thucydides reports an exchange of letters between him and Xerxes. Another issue was his arrogance:

Before held in high honour by the Hellenes as the hero of Plataea, Pausanias, after the receipt of this letter [sent on Xerxes' behalf], became prouder than ever, and could no longer live in the usual style, but went out of Byzantium in a Median dress, was attended on his march through Thrace by a bodyguard of Medes and Egyptians, kept a Persian table, and was quite unable to contain his intentions but betrayed by his conduct in trifles what his ambition looked one day to enact on a grander scale. He also made himself difficult of access, and displayed so violent a temper to everyone without exception that no one could come near him. Indeed, this was the principal reason why the confederacy went over to the Athenians.

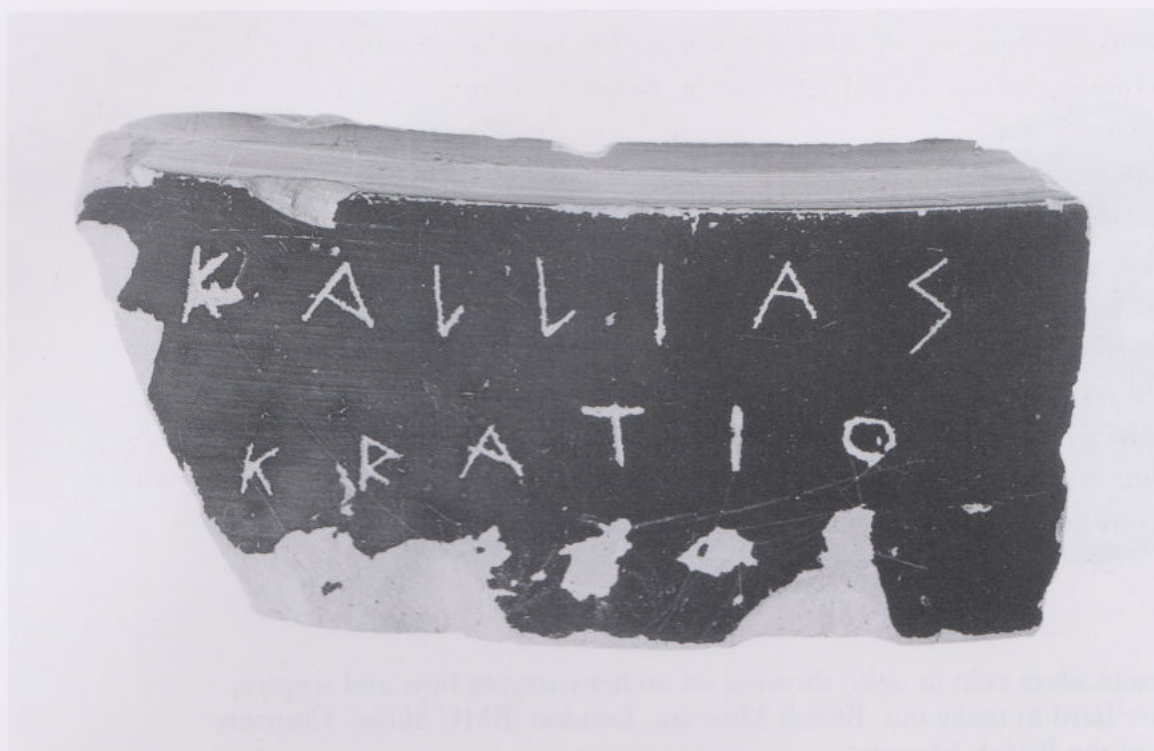
(Thucydides 1.130)

Discussion

The most obvious observation from all three passages is the one I have already made: clearly, there was a certain degree of exchange between Greeks and Persians. They met not just in battle, and they did not simply construct polar views of one another. The passages suggest that this exchange could take different forms. Herodotus 7.150–1 speaks of embassies: a Persian embassy to Argos and, later, an embassy from Athens and Argos to Persia. (Argos was an important town on the Peloponnese – as ever, you should look up important places on a historical map, whether on the course website, in *BHAG* or in the *OCCC*.) The Thucydides passage is the source for the reference in *BHAG* to the arrogant conduct of Pausanias, the Spartan who commanded the Greek forces at the battle of Plataea in 479 BCE (p.139, although we are not given the source). According to Thucydides, Pausanias took to wearing Persian-type clothes and had Persian and Egyptian bodyguards. Other sources corroborate that in certain circles, mostly aristocratic, Persian things were considered chic – and I'm sure you won't find it difficult to find parallels for clothes or accessories associated with foreign, perhaps even hostile, cultures becoming fashionable in some quarters (compare Figures 2.7 and 2.8).

Finally, Herodotus 7.43, as far as we can believe him, gives us a Persian perspective. Xerxes seems to have known some Homer. On his march towards Greece, he visited Troy, perhaps listened there to a recital (if that's what 'heard the whole story' means) and made a sacrifice to Athena, the guardian deity of Troy. At the very least, this is yet another aspect of exchange, cultural exchange to be precise.





Figures 2.7 and 2.8 An *ostrakon*, bearing on one side the name 'Kallias Kratiou' (meaning 'Kallias, son of Kratios/Kratias') and a Persian (note the head-gear!) on the other. German Archaeological Institute (DAI), Athens (Kerameikos 16171/Kerameikos 16172). In Athens, *ostraka* (plural of *ostrakon*, literally 'potsherd') are used in one of the city's characteristic democratic processes. When the Assembly voted to hold an ostracism every citizen who so wished could inscribe a potsherd with the name of a person he wanted to be banished. If there was a minimum of 6,000 votes in total, the person whose name had been inscribed most often was sent into exile for ten years. This particular *ostrakon* shows one frequent accusation made in Athens in the early fifth century BCE: collusion with the Persians, or at least pro-Persian sentiment. By drawing a Persian archer on the back of the *ostrakon*, the person casting it seems to have suggested that Kallias was pro-Persian.



Figure 2.9 Persian silver coin (a *siglos*) showing an archer carrying bow and sceptre, though details are hard to make out. British Museum, London (BMC 36bis). Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum.

Johannes Haubold, a scholar of both Greece and Persia, goes further. He suggests that Xerxes presented his campaign against Greece as a Trojan War in reverse: the East taking revenge on the West (Haubold, 2006). Looked at in this way, Xerxes made himself a latter-day Priam, standing on the citadel of Troy and sacrificing to Athena, one of the deities supporting the Trojans. From here he then set forth towards Greece, waging a war not just of aggression but of legitimate revenge against the earlier Greek war of aggression against the Trojans. I don't know what you think about Haubold's reading. In any case, what is clear is that there was a good deal of exchange – diplomatic, cultural, commercial – between Greeks and Persians in the early part of the fifth century BCE. (See Figures 2.9 and 2.10 for images of Persians made around this time. These images should be viewed together.)

The more difficult question is whether and how this should affect a reading of Aeschylus' *Persians* (or indeed any other Athenian expression of Greek and Persian identity in the 470s and 460s BCE). If the Greeks actually *did* have dealings with the Persians, why did they produce such one-sided texts and images about them? There are several answers one might give. Perhaps *Persians* and other works were generally perceived as distorting, and Athenians were fully aware that Persians were not just effeminate serfs wearing strange outfits. You may remember Edith Hall in DVD2, Section 1 comparing the play to *The Mikado*: a fantasy, but one that everyone knew was a fantasy. Or perhaps we should go back to *Persians* and check whether



Figure 2.10 Reverse of an Attic pot (of the *skyphos* type) c.450 BCE. Berlin Antikensammlung V.I.3156. BPK/Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo: Jutta Tietz-Glagow. Margaret Miller, in *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century* (1997, p.74), points out that the Persian on the Attic pot is based on the standard Persian coin type, as in Figure 2.9. However, she suggests, the Athenian painter did not make sense of the coin and created a figure with odd leg positions and carrying his spear in an abnormal way. This is a good example of, on the one hand, cultural exchange between Athens and Persia but, on the other, the limits to this exchange. Miller's book is an excellent starting point for exploring exchanges between Athens and Persia in the fifth century BCE.

it really is all that distorting. After all, Persians *did* wear different clothes and *did* have a different political system. Yes, the play is full of polarities, we might say, but perhaps these polarities are more exaggerations than inventions? Or yet another view might be that cultural exchange was perhaps constant but fairly marginal, not affecting most Athenians. After all, today most countries have diplomatic relations with most other countries, but that isn't to say that the majority of people feel they have anything to do with the other country in question. So for the purposes of a play watched by a capacity audience, the Persians were a completely unknown entity. This is difficult, but also fascinating, territory, in which much research is being carried out right now. I'm writing this in 2005; quite possibly, by the time you read this, views on these issues will have moved on. In any case, you should certainly keep these questions in mind as we will turn back to *Persians* in the last two sections of Part 1.

1.7 Close reading: the Queen's dream

You have now studied most of the important issues in *Persians*. This is a good time to pause and consolidate your knowledge by commenting in detail on one short passage. Close readings of texts – or works of art, music or something else – are an important skill in the study of almost any field of the humanities. You started developing your skills in close reading in Block 1, and will be asked at several stages of this course, including in TMAs and the examination, to do further such readings. They are a key aspect of any serious work on Classical (and I would argue most other forms of) literature.

Exercise

Carefully read the Queen's dream (179–200) several times, and note down points of interest. Think both about ways in which this passage links into the play as a whole (e.g. recurring themes in the play that come up in it), and about the way this passage is written in its own right. It is up to you whether you want to write continuous prose for practice, or just want to make notes. You may want to consult my running notes on *Persians* in Readings Book 1 before you start.



Discussion

I won't produce a model answer here: there are many ways of writing successful close readings, and I wouldn't want to suggest to you that

there is one that is better than the others. Moreover, tight limits on time or word count will normally call for selectivity. What I will do, therefore, is draw out some of the topics that I might discuss. The list is not comprehensive and, even more important, it is not prescriptive: you would not be expected to work *all* these topics into your answer.

Context: The Queen reports her dream very soon after her first appearance, reflecting her anxiety. It thus adds to the Chorus' anxiety in the opening section of the play and confirms that their anxiety is justified. In turn, the Messenger will provide further certainty of the catastrophe that has struck the Persians.

Audience perspective: The audience, knowing that the Persians were defeated, can interpret the dream with greater certainty than the Queen or the Chorus. This kind of ironical perspective is characteristic of many passages in the play, and indeed of many other Greek tragedies (and plays, novels and so on, written since). It is often referred to as 'tragic irony': spectators know things that the characters don't know. In this case, the audience, unlike the Queen and the Chorus, realise that Xerxes' fall from the chariot symbolises the defeat of his army. However, even the audience can't know at this stage that the Queen's vision of Darius pitying his son Xerxes is in fact prophetic and will, to a degree, be enacted in a later scene (see the point below on Xerxes' dress).

Greeks and Persians: Xerxes' downfall was ultimately caused by his attempt to yoke together the two women, suggesting that he should never have attempted to bring Greece into the Persian empire and perhaps also recalling several references in the play to Xerxes' 'yoking' of the Hellespont as a sign of his overbearing behaviour. The Persian woman is docile and bears the yoke, while the Greek woman shakes off the yoke. This contrast in behaviour contributes to the dichotomy between servile Persians and freedom-loving Greeks throughout the play. In calling the Persian woman 'barbarian', the Queen generalises this dichotomy further: Greeks v. non-Greeks – this, too, is characteristic of the play in general. (However, there are some problematic aspects here that are hard to fit into a smooth reading. First, as you will see later on in the block, Athenian women were for the most part expected to be docile, that is, like the Persian woman, not the Greek one. And secondly, I find it difficult to understand why the Queen, Persian herself, refers to her own people as 'barbarian', which is a thoroughly Greek perspective, unless 'barbarian' wasn't fully derogatory. These

problems seem rather reminiscent of the issues I discussed in the previous section!)

Dress: Dress marks the difference between the Persian and the Doric woman (see note on ‘Doric’ in the line commentary in Reading 2.1), just as the Persians are marked by their dress throughout the play, in words and on stage. Moreover, Xerxes will tear his robes in the last scene, just as he does in this scene, and the dream will be enacted.

Sisters: Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the dream is the fact that the two women are ‘sisters of one race’. They are larger than life and ‘faultlessly lovely’, perhaps as you would expect of people of the past. This setting in the past perhaps permits some vagueness of interpretation, and commentators rightly point out that the Greeks habitually thought of all humans as descended from Greek heroes. But the question remains: is there any significance in calling the women sisters? Could it possibly suggest that the Athenians, even though mortal enemies of the Persians and keen to point to differences between the two nations, acknowledge their ties with them? To explore this sort of question, I’d like to move on to my last section.

1.8 The Athenian audience and the Persians

The previous exercise has brought you almost to the end of your study of *Persians*. One important topic remains to be considered: the audience’s reaction to the Persians’ sufferings. Many people assume that Greek tragedy (and much other drama) in one way or another encourages the audience to identify, sympathise or at least engage with the characters. Predecessors of this view are already found in antiquity, and it is clear from other Greek tragedies that sympathy with the defeated is frequently invoked, for instance in Euripides’ *Trojan Women* (portraying the aftermath of the fall of Troy from the perspective of its surviving women). But is this true for *Persians*? Would Aeschylus’ audience in 472 BCE have identified in any sense with the characters, or sympathised with their misery, or would they just glory in the Athenian victory and the Persian defeat? The question is hotly disputed among scholars, with a whole range of opinions argued vehemently. The vehemence of this dispute suggests that the question is not easy, and that – at least at present – no answer to it will gain everyone’s agreement. And as you learned in DVD2, Section 1, modern productions of *Persians* have chosen to exploit either one of these views. For these reasons alone, I won’t ask you to find the ‘right’ answer. However, your detailed

study of *Persians* puts you in a good position to consider the question, and come to a reasoned judgement of your own.

Because of the complexity of the issue, I will ask you to make the case both for and against audience sympathy with the Persians. I hope you won't take this as a facile exercise in debating skills. I have changed my own mind several times on the question, both before and while writing this teaching material, and I am convinced that it deserves careful exploration.

Exercise

Before thinking about the Athenians, ask yourself briefly what your own reaction is. Do you sympathise, identify or engage in any sense with any of the characters? Why (not)?

Discussion

I obviously don't know what your reaction is, and can't discuss it directly. But the reason I asked you to reflect on it is because it's bound to shape your views of the Athenian reaction in some way. This is inevitable and perfectly legitimate: reaction to any work of literature (or any other art form) will to some degree be intuitive. And your intuitions will help you understand certain aspects of the work. However, your intuition poses obvious dangers. After all, there is no reason to think that you share your intuitions with all other readers or viewers. Therefore, I think it is important to be clear and honest about your own reactions, and try to make them an asset rather than a liability in your further analysis.

Exercise

Now make a case for Athenian spectators identifying, sympathising or at least engaging with the characters. You should think about both the play itself and its context. You may also want to think about what you mean by 'identify', 'sympathise' or 'engage'.

Discussion

My case would rest on three points. First, the Persians could have been portrayed as worse. Most of the characters are nothing to do with the invasion, and even Xerxes is perhaps weak, mistaken and

arrogant rather than thoroughly bad. Secondly, *Persians* provides matters of interest beyond the dichotomy 'good, victorious Greeks v. bad, defeated Persians'. The characters are recognisably human. For instance, the question of hubris and divine punishment is a frequent topic in Greek literature, including tragedy. The suggestion that Xerxes acted out of hubris, and suffered as a result, brings him in line with various other tragic characters. In this respect, one might be tempted to say that the Greeks and the Persians inhabit the same moral universe, suggesting that what happened to Xerxes would be a moral for any Greek spectators. Similarly, the Chorus (as I suggested earlier) evoke Greek cultic material that is likely to be suggestive even though they are Persian. And as for the autocracy of Persian rulers, one critic, Mark Griffith, has gone so far as to suggest that, deep down, even members of a democratic Athenian audience may have enjoyed submitting to an élite authority (Griffith, 1998). Powerful figures have an allure that may sometimes cut across ideology. Thirdly, theatre isn't real life, and theatre audiences know that they are watching a play rather than meeting real Persians. Watching plays means, again only at one level, disregarding certain things. This is true for all theatre. In the case of Greek tragedy, there are some additional factors to consider. The performance takes place in the special context of a festival. This is not everyday politics, but an occasion emphatically removed from normal life. If you read further tragedies you will see how many of them have characters that somehow aren't 'ideal Athenians': women (Antigone, Medea), kings (Oedipus), non-Greeks (Priam, Trojans) and so on. Audiences must have been prepared to experiment with worlds other than their normal day-to-day world, and perhaps even to see themselves in these other worlds. Why shouldn't this apply to the *Persians*? Clearly, *Persians* isn't tabloid-style triumphalism. Its message, or rather messages, are more subtle than the *Sun's* famous 'Gotcha' headline celebrating the sinking of the Argentinian battleship *General Belgrano* in the Falklands War.

Exercise

Now try to make the opposite case: the audience's pleasure in their own victory and the Persian defeat leaves no room for any such identification, sympathy or engagement with Persians on stage. Again you should think about both the play itself and its context.

Discussion

My case would be something like this. First, it is important to recall that there can be no doubt that the play had a strong jingoistic aspect to it. No explicit 'Gotcha' – but glory in the Greek victory is omnipresent. The *Persians* don't have even a moment of triumph. Secondly, where I just argued that the Persians could have been worse, I need to add now that they could have been better. Compared to Hector in the *Iliad*, who is a thoroughly sympathetic loser, for some people the most sympathetic character in the entire epic, the Persians are problematic and alien. Earlier on you studied the lengths to which Aeschylus went in portraying them as inferior to the Athenians. Yes, they are human too, and yes, they provide matters of interest in general, but isn't it more remarkable how much their underlying human nature is hidden by the overlay of xenophobic portrayal of 'barbarians'? Thirdly, anyone making the case for sympathy should ask themselves to what degree they are driven by their own values. Is it that they *want* Aeschylus and his audience to be in line with certain liberal values they may hold themselves? Finally, in response to the issue of theatre not being real life, it may be important to distinguish mythical characters like the Trojan Priam or the woman Medea from historical characters like the Persians. After all, even Darius, the 'good' Persian, had invaded Greece less than twenty years ago, wreaking destruction. In the real-life politics of Athens, accommodating the Persians was considered treason. This must affect the theatre, too.

Exercise

You have now thought carefully about both sides of the coin. Did you manage to convince yourself of either view? Would you want to argue for a view somewhere in between?

Discussion

I would start by stressing that different members of the audience, just like different modern scholars and directors, will react differently. Partly their individual experiences will play a role. Aeschylus himself fought at Marathon, and his brother died in that battle (and it is at least imaginable that he fought at Salamis too). On the other hand, not everyone was equally sympathetic to the increasingly democratic form of government in Athens, and some may have found something admirable in Persia's monarchic system. Such experiences and views may (but need not) shape one's reaction to the play. Still, I don't think

the individuality of audience responses absolves us from thinking about the question in general. After all, not everything is individual, and it is at least conceivable that the majority of the audience would react in one certain way, which brings me back to the question.

As I have already said, I keep changing my view on this, and I certainly don't want to impose a view on you. Rather I would like to emphasise what I think is the root cause of the difficulty. Audience reaction of any sort is most elusive. Identifying, sympathising and, more generally, engaging with any character in any play is a complex process. In the case of *Persians*, much depends on the degree to which you think spectators will adopt what you might call a double consciousness: rejoicing at the defeat of the hated enemy at the same time as they engage with the characters, as though they and their sufferings were close to home (any mother whose son has been humiliated, any person whose ambitions have ended in almost universal catastrophe and so on). Or to put it differently: at the same time as jeering at the 'other', they might use the safe 'other' world of the theatre to identify with what they wouldn't identify with normally. Gauging this kind of reaction is difficult even with contemporary audiences. Doing so at a distance of over 2,500 years is, some might say, close to impossible. However, trying to do so is to think about matters that are at the heart of all Greek tragedy.

References

Ancient sources

Homer, *The Iliad* 2.867, in R. Lattimore (trans.) (1962) *The Iliad of Homer*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Simonides (attrib.), 'Epigram XL(b)', in D.A. Campbell (ed. and trans.) (1991) *Greek Lyric III: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and Others*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.130, in R. Crawley (trans.) (1997) *Thucydides: The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions.

Modern scholarship

Griffith, M. (1998) 'The king and eye: the rule of the father in Greek tragedy', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, vol.44, pp.20–84.

Hall, E. (1989) *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Haubold, J. (2006) 'Xerxes' Homer', in E.E. Bridges, E.M. Hall and P.J. Rhodes (eds) *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miller, M. (1997) *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century: a Study in Cultural Receptivity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Said, E. (1995) *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Further reading

Ancient sources

If you are interested in reading more tragedy, there is plenty of choice, though none of the surviving plays have a historical subject, as *Persians* does. The *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *Libation-Bearers*, *Eumenides*) is Aeschylus' most famous trilogy. *Seven against Thebes*, an individual piece, is also set in the context of war.

Herodotus, *The Histories* 8.40–112, in A. de Sélincourt (trans.), revised by J. Marincola (2003) *Herodotus: The Histories*, London: Penguin.

Herodotus' account of the Battle of Salamis. As you read it, think about similarities and differences to Aeschylus' treatment of the battle in *Persians*.

Modern scholarship

Easterling, P.E. (ed.) (1997) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Excellent individual chapters on key aspects of Greek tragedy in general.

Griffith, M. (1998) 'The king and eye: the rule of the father in Greek tragedy', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, vol. 44, pp.20–84. Not an easy article, but worthwhile. Griffith argues that even in democratic Athens spectators took some pleasure from powerful rulers. Xerxes in *Persians* is one of his examples.

Hall, E. (1989) *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. The standard book on the presentation of barbarians in tragedy. *Persians* features prominently.

Harrison, T. (2000) *The Emptiness of Asia: Aeschylus' Persians and the History of the Fifth Century*, London: Duckworth. Devoted entirely to *Persians* in its historical context. Closer to Hall than to Griffith in its position.

Winnington-Ingram, R.P. (1983) *Studies in Aeschylus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.1–15. An excellent literary study of Aeschylus. *Persians* is the subject of the first chapter.

Part 2 The Acropolis and the Parthenon frieze

2.1 Introduction

In this part of the block, the focus of study changes from drama to art and architecture as we consider the Acropolis, home of probably the most famous monument of fifth-century BCE Athens: the Parthenon temple and its sculptures. The Athenian Acropolis and its buildings represent quite different challenges from those provided by Aeschylus' *Persians*. For example, we are dealing with ruins rather than a complete text; plans and images rather than words; architectural and art-historical lines of enquiry rather than literary ones. Despite these obvious major differences, some of the questions we may want to ask in relation to the Acropolis buildings and the Parthenon sculptures are nevertheless similar to those posed by the Aeschylean text. On the one hand, we might wish to understand the contemporary forces which led to their creation and the traditions in which the architects and craftsmen were working. On the other hand, there are questions to be asked at a more theoretical level about how these monuments and sculptures interact with the values and cultural forces of fifth-century BCE society and what significance they might have had for Athenian men and women of the time. Bound up with all these considerations are the further issues of why these works are still important to us today, and how our experience of them differs from that of the ancients.

Exercise

To give you a first sense of the issues involved, I would like you to do a preliminary exercise. Look at Plates 3–4 and 32 and Colour Plates 1–2 in the Illustrations Book, and consider the following question:



- What problems do we encounter when we try to use the modern-day remains from the Acropolis to help us study Athens in the fifth century BCE?

Take a few moments to study the pictures and note down some ideas.

Discussion

There are many ways of answering this question and I expect that you will have come up with different ideas from mine. Let's start, however, with points which are directly related to the images I asked you to look at.

Perhaps the most obvious point is that the buildings on the Acropolis are ruins. As you can see by comparing Plates 3 and 4, many of the buildings that once stood on the Acropolis are no longer there and those which do remain are damaged in some way (see Colour Plate 1). What may have surprised you, though, is the fact that the Parthenon – the largest temple on the Acropolis – is in a surprisingly good state of repair for a building which is 2,500 years old, and that the layout of the site is largely similar now to what it was then. In fact, this is no accident of survival. The site has met with a number of uses in the intervening centuries, but since Greek independence in 1830 the project has largely been to restore the site's Classical buildings – even when this meant demolishing structures dating from later eras (a process not without its own controversy). A further difficulty here, of course, is determining just what the buildings were like all those years ago. How did they look and when were they built? And what purpose did the buildings and sculptures serve?

Even if we were able to answer all these questions (and thanks to the work of archaeologists and historians most are answerable to a greater or lesser degree), we would still be short of a full understanding of the fifth-century BCE Acropolis. Other questions which occurred to me concern the more immediate context of these buildings' construction. Who decided that they should be built? When and why? Were they expensive to build, and if so, where did the funds come from? Were there other similar buildings in Greece at the time, and if so, how do the Acropolis buildings compare? What do the sculpted images of Plate 32 depict? Finally, what did the people of Athens – or indeed other Greeks – make of these buildings and sculptures?

All these are intriguing questions, and no doubt you came up with other interesting points yourself. What becomes clear is that to engage with the Acropolis buildings on a deeper level – and certainly before we can begin to tackle the more open-ended interpretative questions – we need to know more about the historical and political climate in Athens at the time of their construction and, furthermore, the artistic and architectural traditions of the era.

The structure of this part of the block reflects these needs. In order to get to the point at which you are able to make your own informed judgements about the buildings and sculptures on the Acropolis, and indeed about other examples of Greek art and architecture you may encounter beyond this course, you will start by considering the questions of context below (which will be reflected in the headings of the sections following this introduction):

The historical and political context: When were the buildings and sculptures put up? By whom? How does the building programme relate to Athenian history more generally?

The architectural context: What are the implications of the ruinous state of the Acropolis buildings? What did Greek temples look like and how were they used? How does the Parthenon compare to other Greek temples?

You will then be able to start looking at the Acropolis buildings and sculptures themselves, moving on from the Acropolis in general to the Parthenon (the largest of the buildings) in particular, and then concentrate in the final section on one set of sculptures: the Parthenon frieze (part of which you saw in Plate 32).

The Acropolis: Where in Athens is the Acropolis? What buildings other than the Parthenon were erected on the Acropolis? What was the function of the Acropolis?

The Parthenon: What sort of building was the Parthenon and how was it used? What sculptures (other than the frieze) were on the Parthenon, and what did they portray?

The Parthenon frieze: What did the frieze look like in its entirety? What did it depict? What significance did it have for fifth-century BCE Athenians?

The work on these various sections should take you around a week, roughly a third to a half of which will be spent working on the final topic: the interpretation of the Parthenon frieze (one of the most frequently discussed topics in Classical art history altogether). In addition, at the end of the part, you will be asked to watch DVD2, Section 3, 'The Acropolis and its buildings' and to read James Robson's essay, 'Self and society in Classical Athens' – bringing the total time spent on this part to about a week and a half.

Perhaps the key difference between this part and previous work you have done in this course is the extent to which you will be working with visual materials: plans and photographs in particular. Of course, visual sources require attentive or close 'reading' in a similar way to the written sources you have already worked with. This involves looking at an image

carefully or multiple times in order to extract precise and subtle pieces of information. At other times, it will be important to look at a series of images to gain an overall impression of, say, an archaeological site (such as the Acropolis) or a series of similar buildings (such as fifth-century BCE temples). And like written materials, visual materials need to be looked at in their various contexts, both to gain a fuller understanding of the works in question and to use them as the basis for making broader socio-cultural judgements.

This part of the block is designed to help you develop the necessary knowledge and skills for all this kind of study. Don't worry if you are new to working with images; the nature of the exercises you are asked to perform should make it clear to you what kind of work is required, either by giving you a specific question to answer or by giving you a guide as to how long you should spend on a task. Just as with new types of literary evidence, if you have had little or no exposure to ancient art and architecture before, it may take you a while to get accustomed to thinking about plans and photographs in a critical way. If this is the case, look on the early exercises in this part as an opportunity to practise and hone your skills for the work you will do in the later sections, and for your study of other kinds of material evidence in Blocks 3 and 4.

2.2 Historical and political context

So, before you can begin to answer questions concerning subjects such as the contemporary impact of the Acropolis buildings, it will be important for you to think about the historical and cultural developments of the period directly preceding the start of the Acropolis building programme in 447 BCE.

Exercise



Read *BHAG*, pp.142–5: 'New developments in Athens and Sparta' and 'The "First" (Undeclared) Peloponnesian War (460–445 BC)', using the maps on pp.xxii–xxiii, p.92 and p.141 to help you locate any unfamiliar places. (You may also wish to refresh your memory of pp.138–42 which you read in the course of your work on *Persians*.)

As you read, think about the following questions and note down your answers:

- 1 After Themistocles' departure from Athens, who, according to the text, became the two most important political figures in Athens? How did their political outlooks differ?

- 2 What event is Cimon's ostracism said to mark?
- 3 In what way could Cimon be said to have increased the influence of poorer Athenians?
- 4 Who rose to prominence after Ephialtes' assassination in 461 BCE?
- 5 Where were the Long Walls constructed in 458–457 BCE?
- 6 What significant event occurred in 454 BCE?

Discussion

Since the answers to these questions are all to be found in the text, I shall not provide a crib here. What I shall do, however, is address an important issue which you will have to come to terms with again and again: how to use such general historical narratives in your work on specific topics, in this case the Acropolis. The challenge is to work out which aspects of the overall historical background are *relevant* to the topic in question. The reason this is a challenge is that you can't really select the most relevant aspects of the background until you have studied your specific topic (the Acropolis) in some detail; but, on the other hand, you need to know the background before being able to study the Acropolis in any meaningful way. This is why I didn't ask you to pick out the most relevant aspects: how would you have been able to? Rather, I want to ask you to keep this general background in mind as you work your way through this part, and to be alert to relevant aspects. By the time you reach the end, you should be able to give not just an outline narrative of the history of the period, but also a more focused account of the historical details relevant to the Acropolis buildings.

To help you in this, let me pick out straight away three key points of the narrative which I think you will find relevant for your work on this part:

- the key tensions and changes being experienced at Athens (initially characterised in *BHAG* by the opposition of the aristocratic, pro-Spartan Cimon and the democratic and anti-Spartan Ephialtes – although in truth the rivalry between these men may well have been a struggle between competing aristocrats as much as it was ideological);
- the factors which led to the increased influence of the poorer Athenians (*thetes*) who manned the ships;

- the significance of the transfer of the treasury of the Delian League to Athens. As *BHAG* says, this date (454 BCE) is often taken by historians as the beginning of the Athenian *archē* ('rule' over her allies or, in shorthand, the 'Athenian empire').

Exercise



As you have read, one of the key players in politics in Athens at this time was Pericles. To extend your knowledge of this important figure, now read the entry on 'Pericles' in the *OCCC*, using the text to answer the following questions:

- What sort of family did Pericles come from?
- With which two legislative initiatives in Athens is Pericles credited?
- When did the great public building programme in Athens take place?
- What indication do we have that this programme of Pericles' was controversial?
- What are we told about the historian Thucydides' view of Pericles?

Discussion

Once more, the text should allow you to answer these questions. In addition, let me stress again that what will matter for your study of the Acropolis is not just to gain general knowledge about Pericles (as provided in the *OCCC* entry), but also to see how this knowledge is relevant to the subject in question. It's easy enough to make a start; you now know the answer to two of our questions from the introduction: when were the Acropolis buildings built? And who initiated the building programme?

As for other relevant information, let me pick out some points of significance as I did in the case of the historical narrative. First, I think it is noteworthy that Pericles came from an aristocratic background yet espoused many democratic policies. (Here, too, it is worth reflecting on the fact that these 'democratic' policies included expansion of the Athenian *archē* or empire and the tightening of citizenship laws: Classical Athenian democracy was neither benign nor inclusive. You will get to think more about democracy in Part 3, on Pericles' *Funeral Speech*.) Secondly, we should note that Pericles and his policies were not

without their critics: we are told that Pericles faced opposition from Thucydides, son of Melesias (not the historian), over the building policy, for example. And one may even wish to speculate over the extent to which opposition to the building programme may have fuelled individuals to launch the legal actions against him and his associates. Furthermore, you should also bear in mind as you work through this and the following part that other, less favourable, opinions existed of Pericles than the glowing assessment given of him by the historian Thucydides (or indeed by other writers you will encounter).

You should now take the opportunity to add the dates that you regard as particularly important to your timeline. As you come across further dates you consider significant later on, carry on adding them. You should make this a habit, even when you aren't prompted.



Now let us turn from the politics and personalities of the mid-fifth century BCE to the next set of issues identified in the first exercise: the architectural context.

2.3 The architectural context

The problem of ruins

Suppose ... that the city of Sparta were to become deserted, and that only the temples and foundations of buildings remained, I think that future generations would ... find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be ... If, on the other hand, the same thing were to happen to Athens, one would conjecture from what met the eye that the city had been twice as powerful as in fact it is.

(Thucydides 1.10)

In the initial exercise in this part, you began to consider the problem of ruins. Thucydides' comment here provides a further indication of the challenges we face in assessing unwritten evidence and, as such, it forms an interesting piece of evidence about the Periclean building programme from a contemporary writer. I think we might also add that the fact that he makes the comment at all suggests a recognition of the important part played by public building in any *polis* (city state).

But a problem faces us: by what standards do we judge the buildings of the Acropolis? In considering such a question I think it is important for us – removed as we are in time and culture from the world of Classical Athens – to articulate any preconceptions we may have about the buildings. For example, like me (and many other modern viewers, I think) you may be

inclined to romanticise these buildings simply because they are ruins. What is more, the admiration of Classical art and architecture that has been going on for centuries, and the fact that remains of buildings are preserved and venerated is bound to affect the way in which we view them. In fact, the Acropolis, and in particular the Parthenon, aren't just any instances of Classical art and architecture but have almost iconic status. That is not to say that we can (or indeed should) change our perspective on these buildings, merely that it is helpful to recognise that we do have preconceptions which may in turn shape our judgement.

Once we recognise that our perspective on these buildings is bound to be different from that of a fifth-century BCE Athenian, an obvious further question to ask is: in what way is it different? That is, what would the perspective of fifth-century BCE Athenians have been?

Since there is no way to answer this question with any certainty, however, we must look for other ways to approach the buildings and to gauge their significance for the times in which they were created, and this brings us to the next set of questions on our list.

One way to approach the Parthenon (and, indeed, other shrines on the Acropolis) is as temples. How were temples typically used? How did the Acropolis temples compare with other temples of the day? That is to say, by setting the Acropolis buildings in context, we can begin to discover what is unique and what traditional, what is noteworthy and what commonplace about their form and function, and that will move us beyond our instinctive reaction to the iconic images we are familiar with today.

The use of temples

Exercise



So how were Greek temples, like those on the Acropolis, used? Once again, the *OCCC* provides useful information. Look now at the first paragraph of the entry for 'temple' in the *OCCC*, and think about this question. (If you have time, you may also be interested to read the rest of this entry, which sketches the historical changes in temple design, or to pursue the reference to the entry for 'sacrifice, Greek'.)

Discussion

The paragraph should speak for itself. I hope it helps to bring to life for you what are today mostly aesthetic objects. In the fifth century BCE, the Acropolis was a busy place of worship, where people honoured the gods with processions, sacrifices and prayers. Like today

it attracted large crowds, but for rather different reasons. Different temples varied in detail and, as we shall see shortly, the Parthenon in particular had functions beyond those of a shrine, but for now the *OCCE* article gives us a good basis for understanding what happened on the Acropolis.

So much, then, for the use of temples. We can now move on to their architecture.

Plan reading (DVD)

Exercise

The study of temple buildings in general and the Acropolis buildings in particular will involve working not only with pictures (e.g. Illustrations Book, Plate 3 and Colour Plate 3), but also plans of the monuments concerned and the sites on which they were built (e.g. Plates 5 and 6). The ability to work with plans is one of the skills essential for the study of ancient buildings. By way of preparation, watch DVD2, Section 2, 'Plan Reading' now.



Temple architecture

Now you have learned about working with archaeological plans, you are in a strong position to place the Acropolis buildings within a wider context of temple design in the Greek world. The following series of short exercises is designed to help you do this. We will concentrate mostly on the Parthenon, and I will provide a brief general discussion at the end of the exercises.

Exercise

Now turn to the comparative plans of Greek temples in the Illustrations Book, Plate 5: there are photographs of some of these temples in Plates 7–9 and Colour Plates 3–4. Take a few moments to match the plans with the temples depicted. Finally, compare the plan of the Parthenon featured in Plate 5 and the centre of Plate 6 with the photograph in Plate 19. On first impressions, do you find the Parthenon more or less impressive than these other temples?



Exercise



Next look at Figure 2.11. This diagram shows the 'Doric order', the style of temple architecture most common in mainland Greece in the fifth century BCE. You are not expected to memorise all the different names of the features listed in this diagram. However, spend a few moments now comparing this diagram first with the photograph of the Hephaisteion (Temple of Hephaestus) in Athens (Illustrations Book, Plate 7), the Temple of Hera II at Paestum in southern Italy (Colour Plate 4) and then the photograph of the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis (Colour Plate 1). In each case, make sure you can see the position of the stylobate, the frieze and the metopes, as these features will come up in later discussions in this part of the block. What is distinctive about the metopes on the Parthenon?

Exercise



Now turn back to the comparative plans of temples in the Illustrations Book, Plate 5 (which are all drawn to scale). How does the Parthenon compare in size to the other fifth-century BCE temples? Count the number of columns along each side of the temples: how do the proportions of the Parthenon differ from those of the others? You might like to compare Plate 19 with Plate 7 and Colour Plate 4 to see how the difference in the number of columns affects the look of the temples.

Discussion

These last three exercises should have increased your knowledge not just of Greek temple architecture in general, but also of the Parthenon in particular. Clearly the Parthenon displays the basic architectural patterns of Greek temples, but comparison also shows that it is distinctive in various ways.



It is important to realise that these distinctive features were almost certainly as obvious to many ancient observers as they are to us. In fact, they were probably crucial to the way the Parthenon was designed and perceived. For one thing, the same architects and sculptors working on the Parthenon also worked on other temples. Iktinos, the architect of the Parthenon, went on to build the temple of Apollo at Bassae in the Peloponnese (see Plate 8 in the Illustrations Book), and it is quite possible that the unfinished temple at Segesta (or Egesta) in Sicily was designed by an Athenian (see the plan in Plate 5 and *BHAG*, Figure 7.1, p.167).

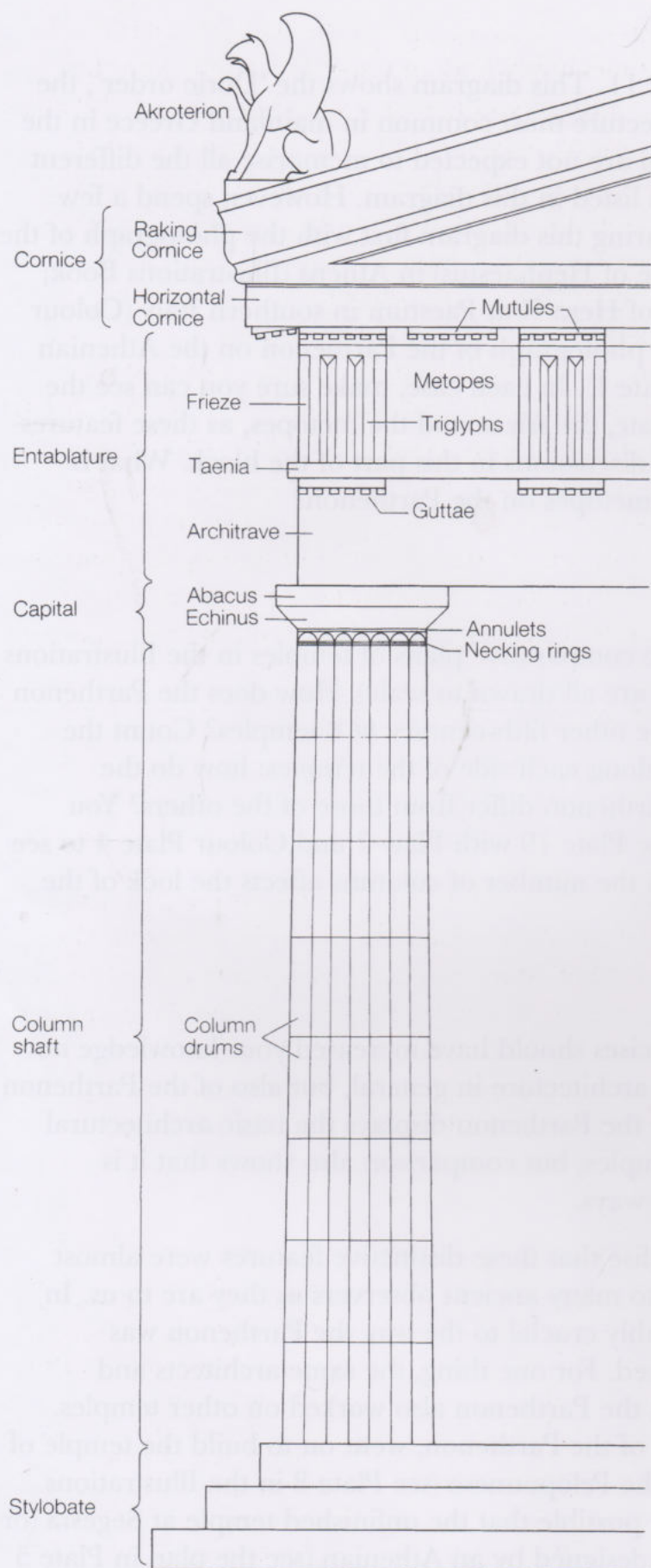


Figure 2.11 The Doric order. © The Open University.

Furthermore, public art and architecture on the scale of the fifth-century BCE Acropolis inevitably had an importance that went far beyond the *polis*. In the extract you read above, Thucydides points out the effects of such display, namely that *because of her buildings* future generations might think Athens to have been 'twice as powerful as in fact it [was]'. And we may safely assume, I think, that Pericles was equally aware of the capacity of grand public buildings to make a powerful statement concerning Athens' power and status in the contemporary Greek world. In short, the impact of the temples and sanctuaries on the Acropolis, rebuilt from the remains of those destroyed during the Persian invasion of Attica in 480 BCE, was in part determined by, and would also have been judged by comparison with, temples and sanctuaries elsewhere. (If at this point you were to go back to the *OSCC* article on Pericles, you might well come to see just how much of what it says is immediately relevant to the Acropolis: clearly, there must be a connection between Pericles' drive to increase Athenian leadership in the Greek world and his building programme on the Acropolis.)

2.4 The Acropolis

Topography



After studying the Parthenon in the context of Greek temples in general, you are now ready to look at the Acropolis itself. First of all, there is the basic question of topography: how does the Acropolis relate to the rest of Athens? Plate 3 in the Illustrations Book and Figure 2.12 should give you a sense. The Acropolis is an outcrop of natural rock dominating the cityscape, visible from afar. Its natural defences were put to use at several points in Athenian history, including the Persian Wars. As the map

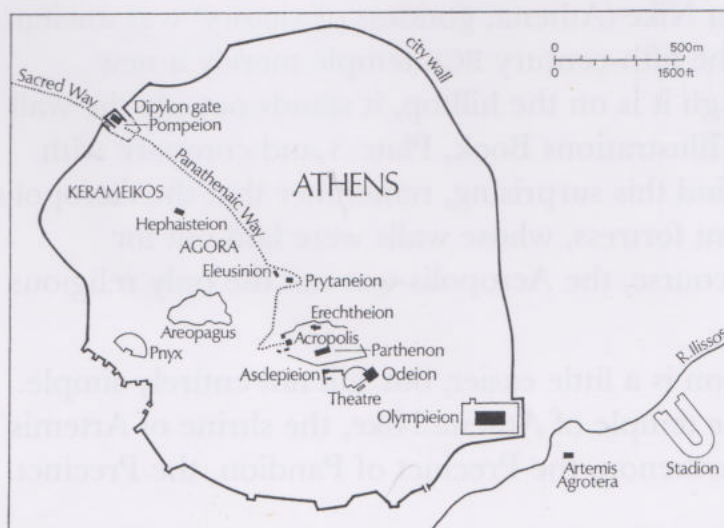


Figure 2.12 Map of the principal sanctuaries in Athens. From H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*. © 1977, London: Thames & Hudson Ltd. The Panathenaic Way started at the Dipylon Gate at the Kerameikos cemetery. From there, it went to the *agora*, and after crossing the *agora* it ascended to the Acropolis.

indicates, the *agora* (marketplace), the centre of Athens, was just below it (ignore the Panathenaic Way for now – you will learn about its significance later): the Acropolis towered directly over the heart of the city.

The Periclean Acropolis

Next, then, the buildings on the Acropolis itself, and their function.

Exercise

Turn to the plan of the Acropolis (Illustrations Book, Plate 6) and take a few moments to answer the following:



- 1 How many buildings can you make out on the Acropolis?
- 2 How many of the buildings are temples?

Discussion

- 1 This isn't as easy as it seems. I make the total eleven; but you may well differ unless, like me, you simply counted the buildings as they are listed in the key. For instance, I have counted the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia as one; but, as it is laid out around three sides of a court, you might argue that it was three buildings, or even four. And, since there is a passage linking it to the colonnade of the Chalkotheke, which shares a wall with it, you could claim the two complexes were one. Here, we are relying on both archaeological *and* written evidence, which informs us that the different structures mentioned were on the Acropolis (in inscriptions and later descriptions such as that by Pausanias in the second century CE). Then again, did you count the temple of Athena Nike as on the Acropolis or not? The worship of Athena Nike (Athena, goddess of victory) was ancient on this site, and the fifth-century BCE temple merely a new shrine; but although it is on the hilltop, it stands outside the wall and gateway (see Illustrations Book, Plate 3 and compare with the plan). If you find this surprising, remember that the Acropolis was also an ancient fortress, whose walls were laid out for defence. And, of course, the Acropolis was not the only religious site in Athens.
- 2 My second question is a little easier, but still not entirely simple. Six buildings – the temple of Athena Nike, the shrine of Artemis Brauronia, the Parthenon, the Precinct of Pandion, the Precinct

of Zeus Polieus and the Erechtheion – were buildings for some form of worship. But not all of these are temple buildings (and the big altar of Athena is left out). By whichever definition we use, I think we can agree that the temple of Athena Nike and the Erechtheion are temples; and, of course, there is the Parthenon. But, if you compare the temple of Athena Nike with the buildings in the Precinct of Zeus and in the Court of the Pandroseion, I think you will agree that they are similar, and that the latter can also be classed as small temples. Yet how vastly different they are from the Parthenon.

Athena's Acropolis

An important link between many of the buildings and sculptures on the Acropolis (including the Parthenon) is the goddess Athena. So before we move on to consider some of the buildings individually, let us have a look at the role played by Athena on the site as a whole.

Exercise



Look once more at the plan of the Acropolis (Illustrations Book, Plate 6) and at Plates 4 and 10. How many temples and statues of Athena do we find on the Acropolis?

Discussion

Even using the plan alone, I found it difficult to arrive at a precise number. As we noted before, the temple and sanctuary of Athena Nike – which was near, if not ‘on’ the Acropolis – and of course the Parthenon itself were both dedicated to the goddess. Also marked on your plan is the ancient temple of Athena Polias, an important *site*, but, as can be seen from the reconstruction in Plate 4, one on which a temple *had* stood, rather than *still* stood, by the end of the fifth century BCE (the reconstruction represents the Acropolis at around 400 BCE). The details about the temple of Athena Polias are disputed, but there is evidence to suppose that what remained of this temple – largely destroyed when the Persians sacked Athens in 480 BCE but subsequently repaired – finally burnt down in 406–405 BCE.



The most celebrated image of Athena on the Acropolis was probably the colossal gold and ivory statue, over twelve metres high, which stood in the Parthenon itself (see Plates 11 and 12). Perhaps just as

remarkable, though, was the image of Athena Promachos (see Plate 10), a nine-metre-high bronze statue sculpted by Pheidias, like the Athena Parthenos. Fragments of the base of this suggest a date around 460 BCE (other scholars argue for a date about 465 BCE, under Cimon), when it was dedicated 'from the spoils of the Persians'. We should recall that these famous images were just two of the many statues and sculptures on the Acropolis featuring Athena. For example, the description of the site by Pausanias (whom you already encountered in Part 1 of this block) serves to remind us that the Acropolis was crammed full of works of art, including a number of further depictions of the goddess (Pausanias' description appears as Reading 2.5 which you should read now). Later, we shall also find her carved on the Parthenon frieze.

When focusing on temples, we should bear in mind that the *temenos* (or sanctuary) was as important as the individual shrine, and the bulk of the Acropolis was covered by a series of linked *temenoi* of Athena. The Parthenon was merely the largest and most elaborate of these. It is also important to remember that the Parthenon was not the home of the most sacred image: at the end of the fifth century BCE that was kept in the Erechtheion (see *BHAG*, pp.174–5, Figures 7.7 and 7.8).



Exercise

Now read the entry on 'Athena' in the *OCCC*. This entry is densely written and contains a variety of information, some of which will prove important for your study of the Parthenon. As you read, use the entry to answer the following questions. (Note that in the final paragraph the author of the entry, Robert Parker, uses the Greek word *mētis*, meaning 'cunning', 'craft' or 'wisdom'.)



- 1 What festival is mentioned in the first paragraph? What was presented to Athena at this festival?
- 2 How is Athena regularly clothed in art?
- 3 By what name is Athena worshipped in her role as goddess of the Acropolis and protectress of cities? Where else is she said to fulfil this function?
- 4 Why is Poseidon mentioned at the top of p.93?
- 5 According to myth, what was unusual about Athena's birth?

Discussion

Again, the text will have provided your answers here. But the importance of Athena and the details you have learned about her will become apparent as we now look at the grandest building of the Acropolis – the Parthenon – and face in earnest the difficulties of interpreting this building and, ultimately, its sculptures.

2.5 The Parthenon

Let's now take a closer look at the Parthenon, before focusing more closely on the details of its sculptures.

The building

In the course of the previous sections, you have already done a good deal of work on the Parthenon. However, so far you have only looked at it in relation to various kinds of contexts.

Exercise



To deepen your understanding of the Parthenon in itself, I would like you to focus on two questions to begin with:



- 1 What makes the building so special architecturally?
- 2 How do the sources we have allow us to interpret it?

Begin by looking at Plate 26, in conjunction with Plates 3–4, 6 and Colour Plates 1–2 in the Illustrations Book. (You may also like to look at the sculptures in Plates 11–17, 21, 24–5 and 27–32, though they will be discussed later.) Also read the descriptions by Pausanias (Reading 2.6) and Plutarch (Reading 2.7).

For the first question, you should aim not just to recall any points you noted in Section 2.3 but also to try and find additional points by looking closely at the plan and images indicated. The second question is more open-ended in nature: in my discussion I note a number of points which struck me as important but you, of course, may consider different points compelling.

Discussion

- 1 In terms of what made the temple special architecturally, you will recall from your work earlier in the block that the Parthenon was both the largest temple of its day and had slightly different proportions from other contemporary temples (see Illustrations Book, Plate 5). But the Parthenon is also distinctive in other ways. For example, you may have noticed the unusual plan, with a completely separate room, the *opisthodomos*, to the west. This was used to house the state treasury, and so links the building very closely with Athens' imperial position. (At this stage you should recall the historical narrative you read earlier in *BHAG*, pp.144–5: it now becomes clear that the move of the treasury of the Delian League from Delos to Athens is directly relevant to the erection of the Parthenon.)

Still, the Parthenon was more than just a treasury. The bulk of the interior space was given over to a colossal gold and ivory statue of the goddess, over twelve metres high (see Plate 11). The layout of the *naos*, with its internal colonnade, two tiers of Doric columns running right round the statue and a shallow pool in front of it for reflected light, is even more elaborate than the great temple of Zeus at Olympia. As a building, the Parthenon has long been famous for the extraordinary, almost imperceptible subtlety of its stonework; and the architect, Iktinos, is known to have published a treatise on the building that presumably detailed this. The stylobate is curved upwards, a mere ten centimetres on the whole length of 70 metres. The sides of the columns taper along a subtle curve; and their axes are adjusted so that the columns lean very slightly inwards (see Colour Plate 1 and Plates 18–19).

Scholars still argue whether the purpose of these refinements was optical correction or exaggeration, or even whether they have a symbolic value. Whatever the reason, it seems to me that their mere achievement suggests a long and well-established tradition of masonry. Here it is perhaps worth remembering that the Greeks had no word for art except *technē*, which also includes what we mean by 'craft' and 'skill'. This is important, for over the last two centuries the Parthenon has all too often been seen as the culminating aesthetic achievement of ancient Greece, more famous for the sculptures (which we shall discuss next) than anything else.

Finally, notice that Plutarch is impressed with the speed of the whole enterprise. We know from inscriptions that the Parthenon took about fifteen years to build:

447–439 BCE Construction of temple, fitting of carved metopes, making of ceilings and roof, carving of frieze.

442–438 BCE Work on chryselephantine (gold and ivory) statue of the goddess.

438 BCE Dedication of the statue at the Great Panathenaia festival.

440–432 BCE Work on the pediment sculptures.

This is certainly impressive, though it probably seemed swifter to Plutarch writing 700 years later than to any young Athenian watching the building grow year by year. Merely getting the materials to the Acropolis was an achievement in itself – some 22,000 tonnes of marble were quarried from Mount Pentelikon, transported sixteen kilometres to Athens (not to mention marble roof tiles imported from Paros), all raised 120 metres up the Acropolis hill and then carved and shaped with great precision and subtlety. The list of craftsmen cited by Plutarch is a useful reminder of the extent to which work on the temple of the Acropolis affected the life of Athens – but we should not forget a group of people which neither author mentions, namely the slaves whose labour was no doubt used in both the transportation and other aspects of the work.

- 2 There are two points that stand out for me. First, the whole development can be seen as the public statement of Athens' recovery from the Persian sack of 480 BCE and her position as an imperial power, especially since the development was paid for out of tribute money. Secondly, the Parthenon was only part of a larger development that included the Erechtheion, the temple of Athena Nike (Plate 9) and the Propylaea (Colour Plate 5 and Plate 20). Indeed, in this series of shrines for the principal civic religion it is worth remembering, as I noted before, that the Parthenon was not the home of the most sacred image. In the late fifth century BCE, that was housed in the Erechtheion (see *BHAG*, pp.174–5, Figures 7.7 and 7.8), a temple which was built in the contrasting Ionic style with much rich and delicate ornament. Just because the Parthenon was the largest shrine does not mean it was the most important in terms of cult.

Useful as our written sources are, they are nevertheless problematic. Plutarch and Pausanias offer the most detailed

ancient descriptions we have; but neither is contemporary, so their assessments need treating with caution. The first thing to notice is that neither author seems much interested in the architecture as such. By their time, the sophisticated development of hallowed traditions seemed unimportant, and the high level of *technē* was ignored. Pausanias, writing in the second century CE, has an antiquarian interest in the myths and dedications, but it is still striking that he virtually ignores the largest surviving collection of datable Classical sculpture (and from a fifth-century BCE perspective this would surely have been surprising since the Parthenon's sculptures were the most extensive of any temple of its day). Pausanias is certainly impressed with the cult statue and the pediments, but does not even mention the frieze which – because of its survival – may seem more important to us.

Plutarch's view, with its stress on economics, reads more persuasively. However, it is important to remember that his references to the Parthenon are merely elements in his portrayal of Pericles as a great leader. We cannot necessarily read them as the standard reaction, still less as representative of fifth-century BCE Athens, and you may recall from the *OCCC* that not all of Pericles' contemporaries may have been as positive about the man as Plutarch is. When you come to study the Funeral Speech in Part 3 of this block, you should consider whether the attitudes expressed there are parallel to Plutarch's. I believe there is a considerable degree of overlap, and that we can see the Periclean Acropolis as a conscious programme of display. The size of the temple is important here, for example, and no other temple had been as extensively decorated with sculpture before. However, the most important factor in my mind is the historical situation. The Parthenon was built before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, but is an integral part of the whole Acropolis development – which was not completed until almost the end of the war. I think we can infer from this that the prestige, even the identity, of the *polis* was intimately involved in the completion of the entire project. The Parthenon, the grandest part, was merely completed first.

You should now take the opportunity to add any further key dates to your timeline.



The sculptures in general



Just as remarkable as the building itself are the Parthenon sculptures. They fall into three groups: the pediment, the metopes (both of which you will study in the next sub-section) and the frieze (which you will study after that). Because the Parthenon, like other ancient temples, is ruined and its various sculptures are scattered in museums, it is very difficult to see them as anything other than museum pieces. Hence, as you now go on to look at them in some detail, it is important that you try to establish the proper context of each illustration you see – and something similar will be true for many other types of ancient material culture that you may study in future, both in this course and elsewhere. To help you in this, we have provided standard captions. These give the original location, description, material and size (where known) and the present location of each piece. Every time you study a plate you should identify the original location, using Plates 26 and 33–34 in the Illustrations Book. Scale is also difficult to recover and each time you study a plate you should check the size mentally against something in your own room. The sculptures of the Parthenon are all made of marble, though they had bronze attachments and may well have been coloured – certainly the backgrounds of the metopes and the frieze were coloured. A comparison of Colour Plates 6 and 7 gives something of the impression of the colours that have been lost. It requires a conscious effort to bear all these points in mind when you study reproductions of the sculpture in your own room.

The metopes and the pediment

The first two sets of sculptures I should like you to look at are the Parthenon's metopes and pediments. Look at Figure 2.13 below, Figure 2.11 and Colour Plates 1–2 in the Illustrations Book to remind yourself where these appeared on the building.

Exercise



Now look at the Illustrations Book, Plates 13–17, 19, 21, 24–26 and 33–34. Also reread Pausanias' description of the Parthenon (Reading 2.6). As you do so, consider the following questions:

- 1 What scenes are depicted over the east and west pediments? Which of these lay above the entrance of the temple?
- 2 On the metopes, which set of scenes were found at the temple's entrance? What do you think is the overall theme of the metopes?

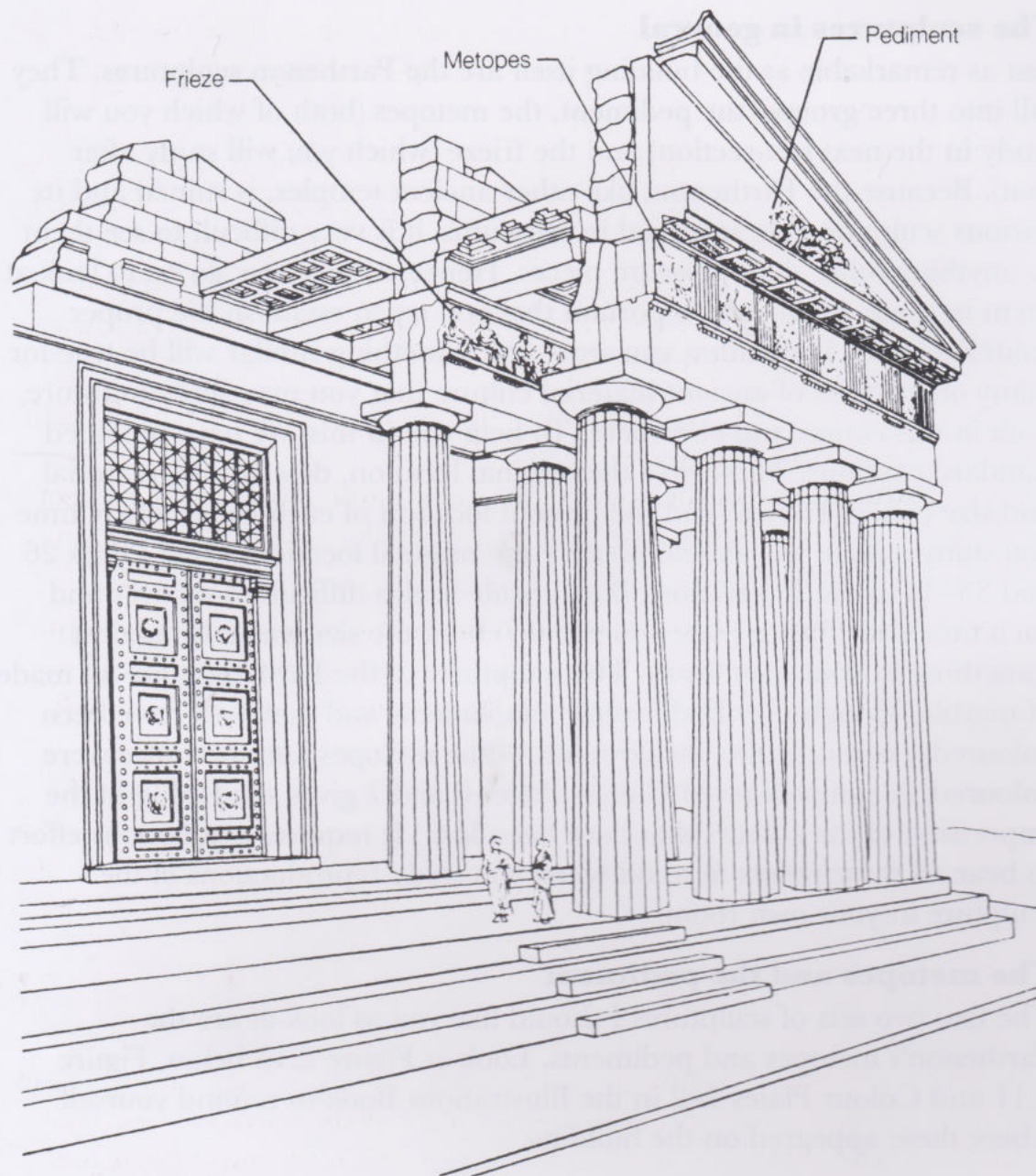


Figure 2.13 Athens: Parthenon. Drawing showing location of sculptures (after G. Niemann). © The Open University.

- 3 Where do the heads of the figures on the metopes tend to be set on each slab?
- 4 Finally, what indication can you find that the metopes were the work of more than one hand?

Discussion

- 1 The composition of the pediments has been reconstructed by scholars (Plates 33–34) but the remains are very fragmentary. Fortunately, we are told by Pausanias what the scene over the

entrance to the Parthenon represented: the birth of Athena. The west pediment, visible from the Propylaea, depicted the contest between Athena and Poseidon.

- 2 The four sets of metopes depicted the battle of Troy and the battle between Greeks and Amazons, Lapiths and centaurs and – over the entrance – the battle of the gods and giants. The overarching theme of these famous mythical conflicts seems to be the triumph of order and (Greek) civilisation over forces which threaten its existence.
- 3 The heads of the figures are often set close to the top of the slab. From below, they would have stood out strongly, breaking the straight line of the edge of the frieze band. Note that this effect would have been strengthened by the sheer depth of the relief (compare Plates 15 and 17).
- 4 It is impressive just how much of a sense of unity there is to the metopes (compare Plates 14 and 15), but obviously the carving involved a large number of different sculptors of differing skill. Some of the sculptors evidently found the management of struggling poses quite difficult, for instance in Plate 16; but the overall consistency is so striking that we can, I think, accept (and be impressed by) the single guiding mind, quite possibly that of Pheidias.

One point worth emphasising before we go on is the considerable quality of the sculptures: this is surely an important factor in the sculptures' being considered masterpieces. Compare the musculature of Plates 21 and 22, for example: the figure from the Parthenon is more lifelike, I think. You can sense the weight that pulls the flesh of the stomach over and there is the same skill in the drapery, too. Plate 24 shows how the folds are arranged to lie across the form and reveal the roundness of the underlying body (compare Plates 22 and 23 from Olympia). Actually this is a sculptor's trick. Drapery would not naturally fall this way, but we see the shadows and the line of the folds and read the shapes underneath more clearly. By contrast, the flying Iris (Plate 25) has a thin material pressed against her body as she rushes through the air. Remarkable, too, but not evident from these illustrations, is that the free-standing figures of the pediments can even boast backs which are fully carved. This is despite the fact that only the fronts of the statues would have been visible from below.

2.6 The Parthenon frieze

The frieze in its setting

This brings us to the third set of Parthenon sculptures, and the topic which will take up the final section of this part and serve as a case study in interpreting ancient art. The Parthenon frieze – the continuous strip of sculpted marble which encircled the Parthenon, running along its inner wall – is one of the most intensely admired and debated pieces of Classical art. Vast portions of this frieze are to be found in the British Museum in London, forming part of what are sometimes called the ‘Elgin Marbles’. They are named after Lord Elgin, who removed a number of the temple’s metopes and large sections of the frieze and pediments from the Acropolis, bringing them to London at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The continued refusal on the part of the British Museum to return these statues to Athens is still the subject of intense controversy at the time of writing.

When examining the remains of the frieze, we should first of all aim to recall how it might have looked originally and its position on the temple. An image such as the Alma-Tadema painting (Colour Plate 11 in the Illustrations Book) is, of course, itself a romanticised view of antiquity, but it does go part of the way towards helping us imagine the colours of the original frieze, even if these are not wholly accurate.

Crucially, though, what this painting does *not* serve to remind us of is how a fifth-century BCE viewer would in fact have experienced the work of the artists (whom Alma-Tadema, like many scholars today, assumed to be Pheidias and his team). It would not have been from close up, in the eaves of the temple, but from several metres below at ground level, glimpsed through the columns. Figures 2.13 and 2.14 and Plate 19 in the Illustrations Book give something of an impression of this perspective.

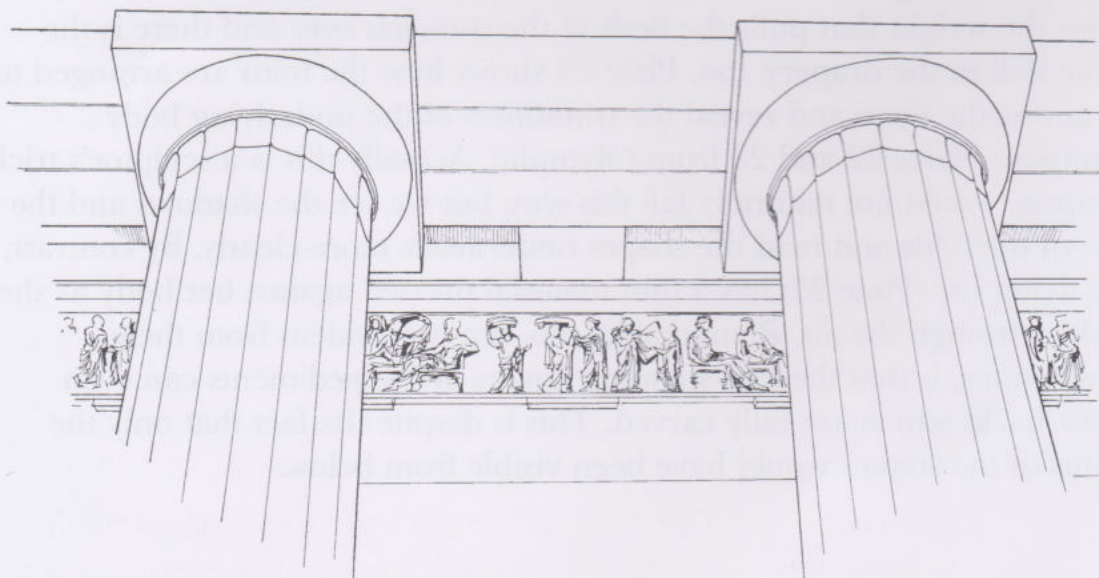


Figure 2.14 Drawing showing the Panathenaic frieze as viewed from below. Taken from Richard Stillwell, ‘The Panathenaic Frieze: optical relations’, *Hesperia* vol.38, no.2. © 1969 ASCSA.

A first encounter with the frieze

Exercise



Bearing these considerations in mind, I would now like you to look at the Parthenon frieze in full. This exercise should take you around 20–30 minutes and will allow you to experience the frieze as a whole. (You have already seen individual sections of the frieze in Plates 27–32 of the Illustrations Book, which you may now like to look at again to compare with the web resources and gain a sense of where these sections belong on the frieze.)

You are strongly recommended to use the links provided in the ‘Course links’ section of the course website at this point, which give you a far better impression of the frieze than is possible from printed photographs and illustrations. However, if for some reason you are unable to do this now, make time to do so later and for the moment look at Plates 26–32 and 35 which you are nevertheless recommended to consult (in fact you will probably find Plate 35 invaluable for many of the later exercises).

As you look at the frieze, consider the following questions:

- 1 What animals do we find on the frieze?
- 2 What are some of the different activities being performed by the figures on the frieze?
- 3 What are some of the different objects that the figures are carrying?
- 4 Roughly, what is the proportion of men to women?

In answering these questions there is no need to be overly exact. Rather, your goal now should be to gain an overview of the frieze and the various figures and activities it contains. (In fact, the questions are fairly simple precisely because I don’t want to distract you from getting a good overall sense of the frieze before you go into details of interpretation in the following exercises.)

Discussion

- 1 The most prominent animals are horses: almost half of the frieze is taken up by the ranks of horsemen, divided into two lines of ten ranks each. There are also ten cows on the south side of the

frieze and a further four cows and four sheep on the north. Note that, whereas most of these animals are walking calmly, at least three are depicted as straining or pulling on their leads.

Aesthetically, the animals serve an important function in providing variety, especially for the long north and south sides. The way in which the horses are carved in particular adds both an extraordinary impression of depth and a sense of speed to parts of the procession – thus making other parts seem slower and more stately.

- 2 The activity as a whole seems to be a procession. Broadly, as the two strands of figures move from the south-west corner round to the east side of the frieze, we find people adjusting clothing or getting dressed, riding chariots and horses, playing instruments, carrying various objects, leading animals, milling about and sitting down. A small number of figures are depicted turning round to look at or talk to others: a device which no doubt adds both additional variety and a sense of continuity to the composition.

Did you notice how the speed of the procession slows down as it nears the east section? The two sides of the procession then draw together on the east frieze (over the entrance of the temple) and we find a balanced composition with a number of mainly seated figures looking out at the approaching processions. In between these are five further figures – two adults and three children – engaged in activities which are not at first easy to identify. We shall look at this key scene in more detail later when we come to discuss how the frieze has been interpreted by scholars. (For an overview of the activities depicted on the frieze, see Plate 26.)

- 3 There is a wide variety of objects depicted, some easier to identify than others. Chariots abound on the north and south sides of the frieze, and many of the youthful charioteers sport helmets and shields. While the riders as a whole boast a variety of head-gear, the majority wears none. Most, but not all, of the male figures are wearing cloaks – you may already be aware that male nudity is common in the art of the period and was also acceptable publicly in certain contexts such as sport or bathing. You will probably have noted the orientation of the frieze: that is, how the two strands of figures ride, gallop and process round from the south-west corner to the centre of the east panel of the frieze. As the figures approach the east side we find an assortment of interesting objects, on both the north and south sides. Here

there are musical instruments – the stringed *kithara* and the *aulos* (remember the Greek theatre) – water-jugs or *hydriai* carried aloft by youths, and just ahead of these more youths carrying oblong-shaped tubs, which scholars generally think to be trays.

Identification of many of these objects is complicated by the poorly preserved state of the frieze or, where parts of the frieze are now missing, the need to work with drawings made several centuries ago.

The east side of the frieze is in many ways the most complex. The women carry an assortment of objects, identified by scholars as paraphernalia traditionally connected with sacrifices, such as cups, wine-jugs, an incense burner and baskets. At the head of the procession on the right-hand side the women hand an object to one of the standing men and two further men hold walking sticks. A boy to the right of the people seated on benches holds a parasol. These larger-than-life figures are unmistakably gods: each is individually characterised and thus, for example, the male figure seated on a throne to the left of the central scene is Zeus, the female to his right is his wife Hera, and so on. The figure on the right of the central scene is Athena: she is identified by her snaky aegis (which you encountered in the *OCCC* entry on Athena) which can be seen lying in her lap.

We noted earlier the scene in the centre of the east frieze. Here the five smaller figures carry more objects – the girls to the left carry what look like two padded stools and the man and boy to the right wrestle with what looks like a large piece of cloth. One of the girls also brandishes an object which is hard to identify: it has been suggested that it is a footstool.

- 4 Even where the figures on the frieze are well preserved, their sex isn't always easy to determine. Some of the younger males are particularly androgynous-looking, and it takes some inspection of the pitcher-carriers on the north side, for instance, to establish that these are in fact youths: the clothing of the central pitcher-carrier on the north falls away to reveal a male chest. In fact, the only side of the frieze where we find women is the east, where over half the figures are female. Women are to be found towards the head of each procession, among the gods (the larger seated figures) and also at the centre of the east frieze where the woman seems to be supervising the activities of the two girls. I counted 37 female figures on the frieze out of a total of around 355, so women represent just over a tenth of the personnel.



At this point you may find it useful to look at the frieze again, to make sure that you have noted all the details mentioned in the discussion above. You may like to look at the frieze on the course website if you have time; you will also find it helpful to look at Plates 26–32 and 35 in the Illustrations Book.

The Panathenaia

So the frieze depicts a procession which culminates with five figures above the entrance to the temple. Various suggestions have been put forward as to what sort of procession this could be, but the most widely accepted interpretation by far is that the frieze depicts the Panathenaia.

Why do I say ‘widely accepted’ rather than simply state that this is what the frieze represents? Well, this is because the ancients left us no record of what they understood the frieze to depict, and so scholars have had to suggest meanings for themselves and then to back up their readings of the frieze with evidence. What I would like you to do in the following pages is to make your own assessment of how convincing the standard assessment of the frieze is. To do this, we need first to think about what the Panathenaia was and then to consider how far the frieze seems to represent what went on at this festival.

The Panathenaia was one of the two most important festivals of the Athenian religious calendar, the other being the Great or City Dionysia during which tragedies and comedies were performed in the Theatre of Dionysus (you encountered the City Dionysia in Part 1 of this block). Unfortunately, the *OCCC* doesn’t discuss the Panathenaia. So here is the (slightly abridged) entry on the Panathenaia from another – German – encyclopaedia dedicated to the ancient world: *Der Neue Pauly*. The author is the ancient historian Robert Parker, and this is my rough English re-translation of the German translation of Parker’s entry.

Der Neue Pauly is more technical than the *OCCC* and Parker assumes a rather high level of prior knowledge in this short article. Therefore, I have provided some brief notes on terms you may not know in Appendix 1 of this block – please refer to this after reading the extract.

Panathenaia. Attic festival, celebrated over a period of several days towards the end of Hekatombaion, the first month in the Attic year ... As known to us, the Panathenaia is a creation of the sixth century BCE; its reform is dated to 566–57 BCE and is connected with Peisistratus. The most important change was the introduction of the Great Panathenaia, which was celebrated every four years as an athletic festival of Panhellenic reach. Panathenaic vases are first found at this time. Filled with olive oil, they were presented as prizes to victors. Musical contests, too, were already in place in the sixth century BCE, as is shown by vase paintings. There is evidence for Homeric

recitations at the time of Hipparchus. Inscriptions give a detailed picture of the range of events, covering both contests among individuals (open to athletes from the whole of Greece) and team contests, such as a torch race among Athenian *phylai*. Certain team events were also held at the so-called Lesser Panathenaia.

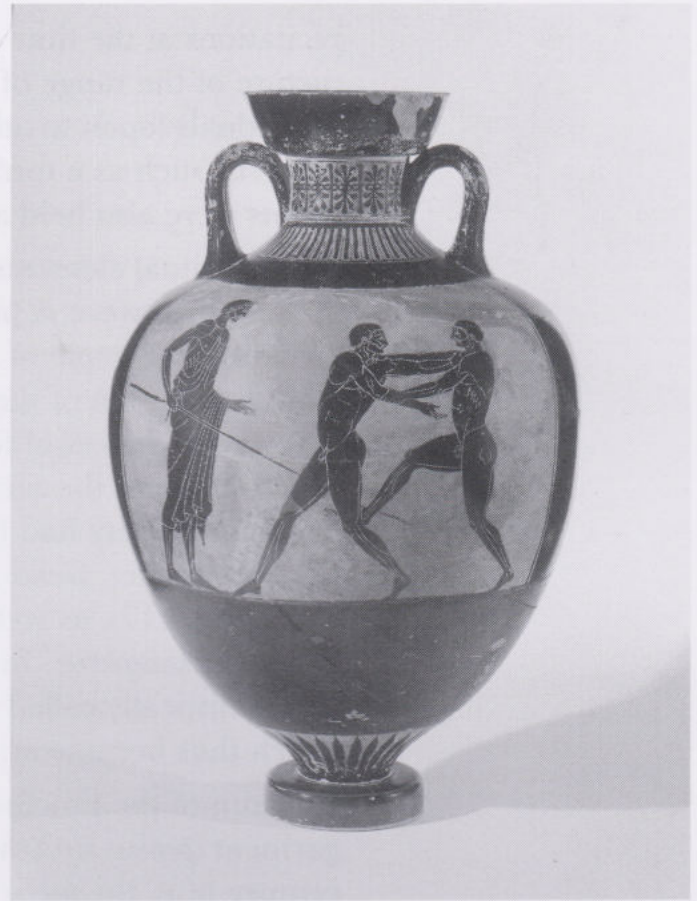
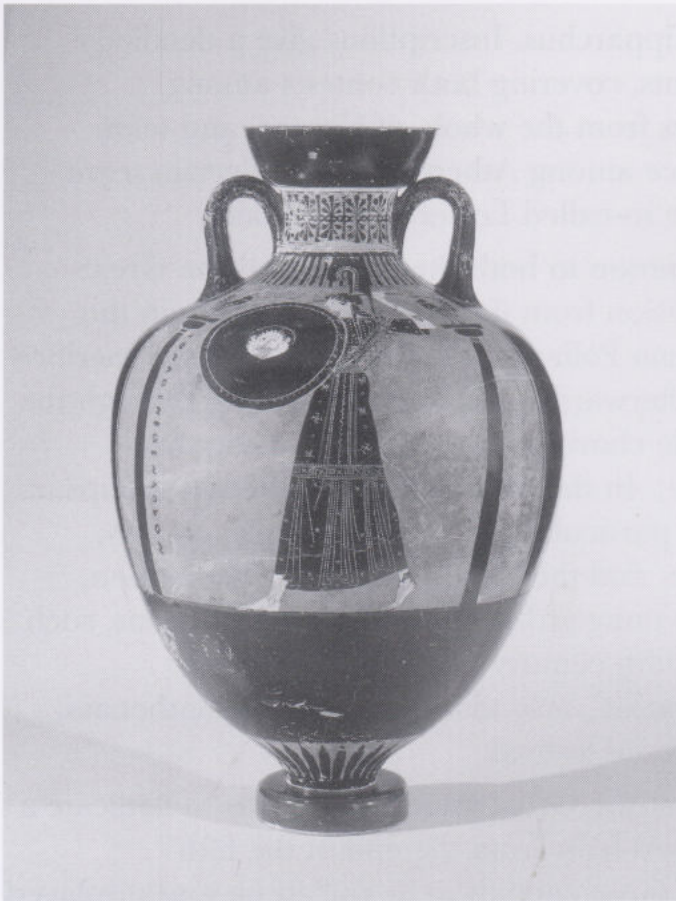
Further ritual elements common to both the Lesser and the Great Panathenaia were: a procession from the Kerameikos through the *agora* to the Temple of Athena Polias on the Acropolis; a large sacrifice with distribution of meat afterwards; and a ritual running through the night, with dances of female choruses (probably following the procession and the sacrifice). In the procession the different groups in Athenian society had their particular place, for example, cavalry, hoplites, metics, freed slaves and the 'stately old men' (Xenophon, *Symposium* 4.17), as well as young girls, who had sacral functions, such as that of *kanephoroi*. In the fifth century BCE, subject-states, euphemistically called 'colonists', also took part in the Panathenaia, which thus became an imperial festival.

The aim of the procession at the Great Panathenaia was to dedicate a garment (*peplos*) to Athena. At least from the end of the fifth century BCE, the *peplos* was large enough to be pulled up and displayed like a sail on a ship on wheels. It was decorated with scenes showing the gods, especially Athena, fighting with the giants. According to a more recent theory, a smaller, perhaps undecorated, *peplos* was dedicated at the Lesser Panathenaia. The procession depicted on the Parthenon frieze is generally thought to evoke the Panathenaia, but details of the relationship are highly contested.

(Parker, 2000, pp.230–31)

Now, as we have stressed from the introduction onwards, you should always make sure that you are aware of the sources for your evidence. Unfortunately, the Panathenaia is particularly complex in this respect, as we don't have any good ancient account of it. Rather, for writing his article, Parker will have had to pull together material from an enormous number of bitty sources, many of them considerably later than the fifth century BCE. To give you an impression, here are just four of them:

- Aristophanes (fifth-century BCE comic dramatist), *Lysistrata* 646–47. Women's Chorus: 'and I was also once a basket-bearer (*kanephoros*), a beautiful girl, wearing a string of dried figs.' (You will read the entire play later in this block; the text is in Readings Book 1).
- Xenophon (historian of the fourth century BCE), *Symposium* 4.17. 'They select stately old men as garland-bearers (*thallophoroi*) for Athena, for beauty attends to every age.'



Figures 2.15 and 2.16 Greek Panathenaic black figure amphora, the Berlin Painter, c.480–70 BCE; terracotta, 62.86cm. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire; gift of Mr and Mrs Ray Winfield Smith, Class of 1918. Such amphoras, with Athena striding forward in fighting gear on one side and motifs such as athletic contests on the other, were filled with olive oil. Together with the oil, they served as prizes at the Panathenaic games. This particular vase was probably a prize in a wrestling competition since the reverse side shows wrestlers. The Greek words running up the side on the front translate as ‘from the competitions at Athens’.

- Plato (philosopher of the fourth century BCE), *Euthyphro* 6c. ‘Do you believe that there really was a war among the gods, and terrible enmity and battles and so on, as the poet tells us and as the good artists depict on shrines and especially on the *peplos* at the Great Panathenaia: the *peplos* which is brought up to the Acropolis and is full of such designs?’
- An anonymous commentator (date uncertain, but significantly later than the fifth century BCE) on Aristophanes’ *Knights* 566. ‘In Athens, the *peplos* serves as the sail of the Panathenaic ship, which the Athenians deck out for the goddess every four years.’

You will have spotted the connections. Between them, these sources account for some of the detail Parker gives. You probably also got a sense of just how many further such sources we would need to piece together to get the full picture. Since we want to press on with the Parthenon frieze, this would probably sidetrack us unduly. So in what follows I will ask you to

rely on Parker; he will serve, as it were, as a short cut to all these various ancient sources. However, I hope that you will bear in mind that the next step in any programme of study focused on the Panathenaia would be detailed work on the ancient sources. And when I point in what follows to some uncertainties concerning the Panathenaia, you will know why: because putting together all those sources involves subjective interpretation. Parker's article is excellent and reliable for our purposes, but he too had to use his own judgement.

Matching the figures on the frieze to the Panathenaia

Exercise

Now consider the following questions on the basis of Parker's article and your study of the frieze so far. Since Parker's article is quite dense, I recommend you first read it through once again.

- 1 What do you think may have made scholars suggest that the Parthenon frieze depicts the Panathenaia?
- 2 What elements of the procession as described by Parker are not represented on the Parthenon frieze?
- 3 Are any of the figures on the frieze engaging in any activities which might *not* seem to be associated with the Panathenaic procession?

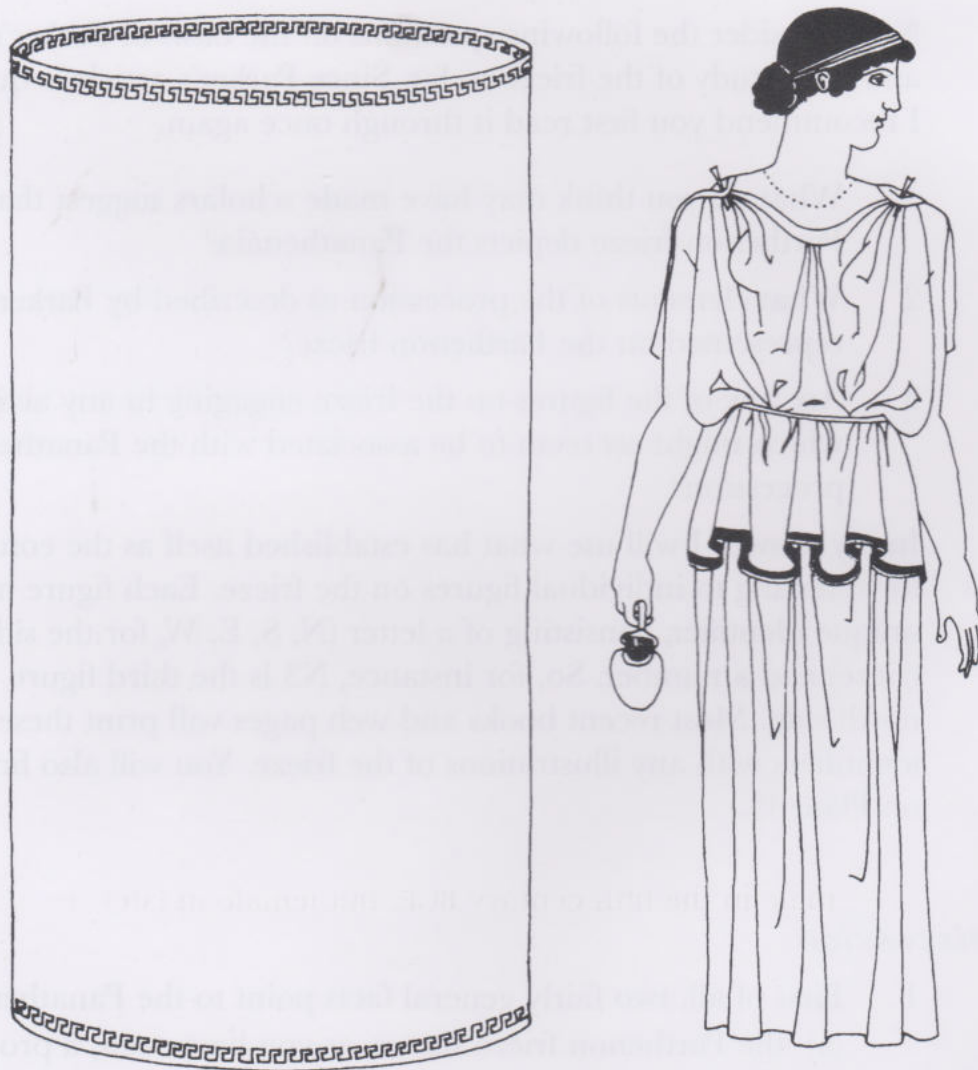
In my answer I will use what has established itself as the convention for referring to individual figures on the frieze. Each figure has a unique identifier, consisting of a letter (N, S, E, W, for the side of the frieze) and a number. So, for instance, N3 is the third figure on the north side. Most recent books and web pages will print these identifiers with any illustrations of the frieze. You will also find them on Plate 35.

Discussion

- 1 First of all, two fairly general facts point to the Panathenaia:
 - (a) the Parthenon frieze shows, as you have seen, a procession;
 - (b) the Parthenon is a temple dedicated to Athena, making the Panathenaia, a procession worshipping her of out of all gods, particularly appropriate.

This is no proof, of course, but certainly an indication. (Although I should remind you that, as Parker says, the Panathenaic procession ended at the nearby temple of Athena Polias, not at

the Parthenon, certainly until almost the end of the fifth century BCE.) At the level of detail, the most important figures for identifying the overall theme are the man and child at the centre of the east frieze (E34 and E35). They are handling what I previously called a large piece of cloth. Many scholars have identified this object as the *peplos* that was at the heart of the Panathenaic procession, as you saw earlier (see Figures 2.17 and 2.18). The Panathenaia isn't completely unique in the prominence it gives to a garment, but there can be no doubt that the piece of cloth strongly suggests that Athenians would have thought of the Panathenaia when looking at the frieze.



Figures 2.17 and 2.18 Drawings of a *peplos*, by itself and as worn. Taken from Anastasia Pekridou-Gorecki, *Mode im Antiken Griechenland: Textile Fertigung und Kleidung*, Verlag C.H. Beck, Munich, 1989. With kind permission of Dr Anastasia Pekridou-Gorecki.

Beyond the *peplos*, things become less certain; I will pick out three possible matches between Parker's description and the frieze.

- (i) First, Parker speaks of 'stately old men': despite a general emphasis on youth on the frieze, there are some elders (N28–43, S89–106).
- (ii) Secondly, Parker lists metics (resident foreigners) as among various groups represented in the Panathenaic procession: I doubt that you would have spotted them on the frieze, since Parker doesn't give any detail about their outfits. According to later literary sources, metics in the procession wore purple cloaks and carried trays. The young men N13–15 and S119–21 may be such tray-bearers.
- (iii) Thirdly, another group identified by ritual objects they carry, the *kanephoroi* (basket-carriers). Many scholars doubt that they are represented on the frieze. There seem to be no female basket-carriers. The only vaguely basket-like object is held by figure E49, who can't be one of the *kanephoroi* because it is male, while *kanephoroi* are female. There is only one way of reasoning that there are *kanephoroi* after all: the male figure E49 faces two young women (E50 and E51). You could argue that he has just received the tray or basket from the two women, who would, therefore, be the *kanephoroi*. I leave it to you to judge whether you think this makes sense.

- 2 Again this is partly a matter of interpretation. I've already mentioned the question of whether *kanephoroi* do or do not feature on the frieze. There is a similar problem concerning the men carrying water-jugs or *hydriai* (N16 and N19). Although not mentioned by Parker, *hydriaphoroi* (*hydria*-carriers) are part of Panathenaic processions. However, like the *kanephoroi*, the *hydriaphoroi* should be female. Or so the late sources tell us. So we either have to accept that the Parthenon frieze doesn't depict the Panathenaic *hydriaphoroi*, or we have to assume that they were male in the fifth century BCE, but female in later periods.

Coming back to Parker, I would stress one important and memorable item that is clearly missing: the ship on wheels, which was pulled along with the procession. Again, though, there is a possible explanation. As Parker put it in the extract earlier, the ship featured from 'at least the end of the fifth century'. We don't know whether it would already have featured in the procession in the middle of the century, when the frieze was created. Hence it

is unfortunately impossible to say how significant its absence from the frieze is.

Among the other groups of people Parker mentions in his penultimate paragraph, there are some that are clearly not on the frieze. Most important, the hoplites or infantry – the frieze only shows riders, but no foot soldiers. Foreigners and freed slaves, too, aren't clearly marked, though it's harder to tell whether a figure would be a foreigner or a freed slave than whether it would be a hoplite, who after all would have to carry arms and wear armour.

- 3 Yet again, much depends on the interpretation of individual figures. Many are so hard to identify that proving that they are nothing to do with the Panathenaic procession is impossible, even if the connection is far from clear. I want to highlight only the most important issue. As you saw earlier, a large proportion of the frieze is taken up by horses and chariots. This raises complex questions.

Parker says that the Athenian cavalry took part in the Panathenaic procession, which may well be true (though some scholars disagree: the evidence is ambiguous). So the riders have their place. What about the chariots, then? The Athenian cavalry hadn't been using them for over a hundred years when the frieze was designed. In the fifth century BCE, chariots were associated with sporting events on the one hand and the Homeric past on the other. Clearly, they wouldn't make it into the depiction of a fifth-century BCE procession as part of the cavalry. What might get them a place, though, is the Panathenaic sporting events that Parker mentions in his first paragraph. We know from a range of sources that chariot races were among them. So it's quite possible that the contestants and their chariots paraded in the procession too. Once again, we don't have enough evidence to judge (and once again scholars disagree). Anyway, none of this removes the core of the problem: the sheer number of horses. Yes, riders and charioteers may have been elements in the procession, but they can't have taken up over 50 per cent. The counterpart to the missing hoplites is the excess horses. We can find interpretations of individual objects, but we can't make the west and much of the north and south of the frieze go away. I will come back to this.

You may also have thought of the gods on the frieze, who are – obviously – not on Parker's list of elements of the procession – another issue I will come back to.

One concluding comment. In my discussion just now, I have gone through individual figures in considerable detail. I have done so not because I expect you to memorise every small detail of the frieze, but to give you a sense of the sort of judgements that we have to make in our attempt to arrive at a valid interpretation of the frieze.

In summary, then, I hope you agree that there are good reasons for saying the subject of the frieze is the Panathenaia. But I hope you also agree that there are quite a few issues. The interpretation of the frieze as depicting the Panathenaia is probably persuasive, but it would be a mistake to assume that the frieze is the ancient equivalent of a photo, capturing exactly what the procession looked like.

The *peplos* scene

Exercise



To get an even closer sense of the challenges involved in interpreting the frieze, I would like you now to concentrate on the culminating scene on the east frieze, where the two processions come together. Take a few minutes to look at figures E24–E42 and consider the following questions. You may either look at them via the course website or in the Illustrations Book, Plate 32. (As in the previous exercise there isn't necessarily one right answer.)

- 1 What are figures E34 and E35 doing with the piece of cloth?
- 2 What are the objects carried by figures E31 and E32, and what is their purpose?
- 3 What is the role of the gods (E24–E30 and E38–E42), and why are they looking away from the central scene?

Discussion

- 1 One thing is clear: figures E34 and E35 seem to be handling the piece of cloth folded in the middle. As I said before, one obvious interpretation is that this is the *peplos* used in the Panathenaic procession, but it's worth pointing out that there is nothing about the way the piece of cloth is depicted that suggests it is a *peplos* (see Figures 2.17 and 2.18). Without the context of a procession, probably no one would ever have suggested that this is a *peplos*.

What exactly the two figures are doing with the *peplos* (as I shall call it, following the standard interpretation) is less clear. They are either folding or unfolding it. Trivial as this question may be, it probably has consequences for what the scene as a whole is about. A natural (though again not necessary) assumption would be that folding implies that the ceremony of giving the *peplos* to Athena is over, and the *peplos* is now being stored away. The other way round, unfolding might signify the last stage in the preparations for the dedication. Have another look to see whether you prefer folding or unfolding.

Either way, we have to face what may seem to be a surprising conclusion. The culmination of the procession isn't the dedication of the *peplos* to Athena, which would appear to be an obvious highlight. Rather, it is the stage just before or just after. We can think of various reasons. There is evidence, for instance, to suggest that the statue of Athena Polias wasn't draped with the *peplos* until ten months after the Panathenaia. Perhaps, therefore, it would be inappropriate to have the draping ceremony depicted in the context of the Panathenaia. Another reason may be that fifth-century BCE Athenians had a different sense of what makes a moment a highlight, and of what moment is worth focusing on in a work of art. Remember, for example, that *Persians* didn't end with the news of the Persian defeat or the arrival of Xerxes but with a long lament after the event.

Who, finally, are the two figures handling the *peplos*? The man is generally assumed to be a priest, as only priests wear this kind of short-sleeved and ankle-length outfit. This makes sense. You would expect a priest, a priest of Athena in fact, to handle the *peplos*. This in turn suggests that the figure to his left, E33, is a priestess. The child, however, is problematic. Scholars debate whether it is a boy or a girl, with good arguments on both sides. The face is too damaged to give any clues, and the clothing is ambiguous. Either is possible, or rather, our knowledge of the *peplos* ceremony or ceremonies at the Panathenaia is too limited to say exactly what role the child had, or to rule out either a boy or a girl.

- 2 Most scholars agree that these objects are likely to be stools. This is quite clear from the line drawing. However, if you look at the photo of the remnants of the frieze, you will see that the legs are almost completely missing from the marble, and reconstructed in the line drawing. Only E31 still has traces of a leg, perhaps just enough to make the reconstruction plausible, but other

suggestions include funeral shrouds, trays and clothes. If the objects *are* stools, what are they for? This is another problematic question. Are they for the priest and priestess? Or for the gods that are standing (E28 and E42 – rather far away perhaps)? Or for the *peplos*? Again, we are hampered by the limits of our knowledge about the ceremonies in question.

- 3 The gods are seated on either side of the *peplos* ceremony, with the father and most powerful of the gods, Zeus (E30, the only one on a throne), and the dedicatee of the temple, Athena (E36, with one of her attributes, the snaky aegis, in her lap), closest to the centre. Seating them is, apart from anything else, a sleight of hand on Pheidias' part. This way they can be depicted as taller than all the standing figures while still fitting into the dimensions of the frieze, and their greater height is a way of indicating that they are gods. Moreover, as the art historian Jenifer Neils points out (2001, pp.198–201), seated gods occur elsewhere in the context of what is called *theoxenia* ('hospitality for the gods'), a ritual which involves a kind of mock banquet for the gods. Apart from design considerations, therefore, the fact that the gods are seated may also have expressed worship, since they are imagined as attending a feast prepared for them by the Athenians.

This leaves the question of why the gods look away from the *peplos* scene. Yet again there isn't an easy answer. Pheidias probably faced a problem. Ideally, the gods would both look at the *peplos* scene and welcome the procession arriving from either side. Achieving both is difficult. So perhaps (some people think) all there is to be said is that Pheidias had to make a choice, and his choice was to make the gods welcome the processions. You may or may not find this rather technical solution a satisfactory way of settling the matter.

Finally, there is the question of what the gods are doing in the procession at all. Having Athena, the patron deity of the Panathenaia, attend her own procession is perhaps no great surprise. Even though Athena didn't of course sit on the Acropolis herself waiting for the procession, the imaginary scene is easily understood. Her father Zeus may also find his place. But what about all the other gods? Scholars identify (from left to right) Hermes, Dionysus, Demeter, Ares, Hera, Zeus and then Athena, Hephaestus, Poseidon, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite – all the major Olympian gods. This is more than what you would expect in the context of the Panathenaia. As ever, there is no single answer, but I think we probably have to acknowledge that

the frieze doesn't just concentrate on the Panathenaia as it was regularly performed in Athens in the fifth century BCE. Going beyond the Panathenaia festival itself, the frieze invokes human–divine relationships in general. Athens worshipped all the gods, and was protected by all the gods. It's almost as though the city laid claim to the whole pantheon.

This brings us to the end of exploring the Panathenaia interpretation of the Parthenon frieze. You will, I hope, have formed your own views about its merits or otherwise. No matter whether you accept it or not, I think it's important to stress one point in conclusion: it is exactly that, an interpretation. Any attempt to establish the exact relationship between the frieze and the Panathenaia involves interpretation and even speculation. In the *peplos* scene, scholars start from identifying the piece of clothing as the *peplos* because the Panathenaia theme suits the context of an Athena temple and a procession. They then try to make sense of the other figures. Good interpretations have been found for all of them, but it is mostly the idea of an underlying Panathenaic theme that drives the interpretation of individual figures, and not an identification of the individual figures that drives the notion of a Panathenaic theme. Equipped with an overarching framework, scholars chase for pieces of information that may help them to interpret the individual figures so as to fit in with the framework. That's why many of the points I made in discussing details of the *peplos* scene were impossible for you to arrive at. They resulted from scholars looking to other sources (represented by Parker's article in your case) to interpret the frieze – not simply from looking at the frieze, which is all you could do. All this doesn't mean that the interpretation of the *peplos* scene as part of the Panathenaic procession is wrong. It just means that you need to be conscious of what sort of support it does or doesn't have.

Multiple meanings

You have by now done a considerable amount of work on the Parthenon frieze, and in particular on its likely connection with the Panathenaia. Most of your work has been at the level of detail of answering questions such as: who is this figure? what is he or she doing? why is he or she doing it? In the final group of exercises in your work on this part, I would like you to think more generally about the interpretation of the frieze. But before you do that, let me set the scene.

Given the challenges you have been engaging with, it probably comes as little surprise to you if I tell you that there is an enormous amount of scholarly literature on the Parthenon frieze, debating exactly what it is that Pheidias depicted (you will find suggestions for further reading at the end of this part of the block). Most scholars, I think, would agree that the frieze

invokes the Panathenaia. But, as you saw, there are various ways of understanding this invocation. Is the frieze, for instance, a depiction of just the fifth-century BCE procession, or are there some idealised elements (e.g. the gods) in it? With what degree of exactness does the frieze try to represent the procession? Some people go further and ask whether it isn't instead about some vague *mythical* Panathenaia, a 'proto-Panathenaia' if you like. One of their reasons (apart from figures like the gods) is a problem I haven't mentioned so far, one of the most intensely discussed problems altogether in fact.

There is no precedent for having contemporary, that is, human, events depicted on a Greek temple. Humans on vases are OK, but humans on temples (i.e. in a public space) apparently aren't. As you saw earlier, the rest of the Parthenon sculptures tell stories about gods and characters in myth, not about contemporary mortals, and the same is true for other temples of this period. (Although as you will read in James Robson's essay, 'Self and society in Classical Athens', the Temple of Athena Nike, built some time after the Parthenon, may depict Marathon-fighters, i.e. *near*-contemporary mortals.) The Parthenon frieze, exceptional in many ways, may well be exceptional in this respect, too, just as *Persians* is exceptional in using real events rather than myth as the subject matter for tragedy. Moreover, the frieze is the least prominent set of sculptures on the Parthenon. But you can see why some scholars prefer the mythical 'proto-Panathenaia'.

This problem – contemporary events on a temple – has contributed to some interpretations dispensing with the Panathenaia altogether. John Boardman (1977), for instance, suggests that the frieze depicts the Athenians who fell in the battle of Marathon against the Persians, as does in a different way the later Nike temple. The Marathon-fighters enjoyed enormous respect in Athens and were even worshipped in a cult, and thus perhaps deserved a place on a temple. Boardman's thesis is based on the fact that the number of Athenian dead recorded by the historian Herodotus is 192 (Herodotus 6.117) and Boardman counts 192 fighters on the frieze. As you have probably already noticed, though, counting figures on the frieze isn't as straightforward as one might think. If you like, try to replicate Boardman's count. I suspect you won't hit 192 on your first count. This isn't to say that Boardman must be wrong; it is to say, though, that he isn't obviously right. Others avoid the contemporary theme by going into the realms of myth, suggesting various stories involving the early Athenian king Erechtheus. For instance, Erechtheus had to sacrifice his daughter to protect Athens against an invasion. Joan Connelly (1996) suggests that the child E35 is a girl and in fact the daughter Erechtheus is about to sacrifice. The piece of cloth isn't a *peplos* but a funeral shroud, and the gods look away because they don't wish to be tainted by the death. Like the

Panathenaia and the Marathon interpretations, the sacrifice theory has its weaknesses. Most important, there is little sign of a sacrifice: no knife and no altar. Moreover, some scholars feel that the story of Erechtheus' daughter, known to us from a play by Euripides that survives only in fragments, was too obscure for such a high-profile frieze; but this is hard to judge as so much material is now lost.

Next, there are arguments over the political implications of the frieze among those who support the Panathenaia interpretation. On the one hand, it can be seen as a celebration of *all* of Athens. As Parker points out, the Panathenaia was an inclusive festival, with every part of Athenian society represented, women and metics included. It gave a role to members of society who were excluded from others aspects of public life, such as voting in the Assembly or holding political offices. Moreover, the lack of individuality in the faces could be seen as an expression of democratic ideology. Just as in Aeschylus' *Persians* none of the Greeks was named, so here none of the figures was recognisable and most of them were youthful (though it should be said that idealisation is characteristic of Greek art of this period in general).

On the other hand, as you saw, not all sections of society are represented on the frieze in the same way as at the Panathenaic procession. Horsemen clearly outweigh all else, and in fifth-century BCE Athens, as in many other societies, the cavalry was an élite institution, as indeed were equestrian sports. You needed to finance your own horses and equipment, and that was expensive. The cavalry was being greatly expanded while the Parthenon was built, but even so it was only 1,000 strong – only a small fraction of all Athenians. Therefore, Robin Osborne (whom you have already encountered on DVD1 in Block 1) has argued that, yes, the frieze shows the Panathenaic procession, but it does so through an aristocratic lens (Osborne, 1987, pp.103–104). It represents the Panathenaia in a very élitist way, giving prominence to those groups of society that could afford horses – more prominence probably than they had in the real-life procession. (At this point you may recall again the historical narrative you read at the beginning of this part, and the points it makes about tensions between different social groups in Athens of the time. Osborne's interpretation makes it more than just a background narrative, and shows that certain aspects of it are clearly relevant to the Parthenon frieze.)

Finally, there is a discovery that the team working on the conservation and restoration of the Parthenon has made recently. It seems possible now that what is known as 'the Parthenon frieze', the frieze you have been studying in this block, is only one of two friezes on the Parthenon. A few small remnants suggest that there may have been a second, smaller, frieze on the east side of the temple, behind 'our' frieze. At present (2005), very

little is known about this frieze. The only thing that's clear is this: if there was a second frieze on the east side of the Parthenon, as it appears there was, it would have had an impact on the meaning of the 'first' frieze. Yet again we have to realise just how many unknowns go into any equation we form about the Parthenon frieze.

This is a good place to stop. I could continue outlining further interpretations and problems, but I doubt that this would add much. I'm sure that by now you have gained a sense of just how contentious and complex the interpretation of the frieze is. It is this complexity that I would like you now to reflect on in your last set of exercises.

Clearly, there is considerable uncertainty about the interpretation of the Parthenon frieze. Different theories have been put forward. This raises the question of whether they are all equally valid or not. Or to put it differently: does the Parthenon frieze have multiple meanings or does it mean just one thing? This question will occupy us for the remainder of Part 2, and it is a question that resurfaces in different guises in many different areas of study in the arts and humanities. So I hope that this final set of exercises won't only increase your understanding of the Parthenon frieze but will also help you in your work elsewhere.

Exercise

To begin with, I think it is important to remember that the meaning doesn't merely 'reside' in the frieze but depends to a degree on the interpreter – the eye of the beholder, if you like. So, first of all, I would like you to think about the interpreters. When we say 'the frieze probably means this and that', who are we actually talking about? Who are the people to whom the frieze is supposed to mean 'this and that'?

Discussion

Well, there are many different people whose interpretations we could think about. There are the experts I talked about, like Boardman or Neils. There is you yourself; after all, I asked you all the way through to make your own judgements. There are the visitors to the British Museum. There are the people who are concerned with whether the remains of the frieze should be in London or in Athens, and so on. The point is that there are many different interpreters, and they will have different views. However, there is one group of interpreters who probably has a special claim to our attention, and you will probably

have thought of this group yourself. It is the fifth-century BCE Athenians.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, most of the things people say about the interpretation of the frieze imply that it is an interpretation that the fifth-century BCE Athenians would have agreed with in some way. Of course you can say, and some people do say, 'I don't really mind what the Athenians thought. My own interpretation is my own interpretation, and I'm not really interested in the ancient Athenians. The frieze is a work of art for me as much as for anyone else, and that's how I will look at it.' This is indeed a fully legitimate stance to take, and probably one we all take some of the time when we go to a museum. But most of us are also interested in bridging the gap between us today and the period in which the work was created. Much of what you did throughout this part of the block is to accumulate information that puts you in a better position to judge what the frieze might have meant to the Athenians.

What has all this got to do with multiple meanings? Generally speaking, different interpreters attribute different meanings to the frieze. But, more specifically, our distance from the ancient Athenians is one cause of the multiple interpretations I've talked about. I think it is fair to say that all the scholars I mentioned have tried to establish what the frieze meant to the Athenians. However, since we don't have perfect information today about the Athenians of the fifth century BCE, this is – in part – a necessarily speculative undertaking.

Perhaps the crucial phrase in my last sentence is 'in part'. I wouldn't want to remove it since I wouldn't want to suggest that it's all speculation. It would hardly be worth the effort of working through this unit if all that's left is speculation. On the other hand, it's also clear, I hope, that we can't eliminate a degree of uncertainty. So perhaps the challenge is how we can whittle down the numerous different interpretations to those that would have been acceptable to the Athenians. In extreme cases this is easy. If someone said to you: 'The Parthenon frieze represents the homecoming of Odysseus', you would say immediately: 'Certainly not.' But things are more complicated when you try to decide between the Panathenaia interpretation, the Marathon heroes interpretation, and the Erechtheus interpretation.

Exercise

Now I would like you to draw up a list of general criteria that you would use for evaluating different interpretations of ancient pieces of art (or indeed literature). I should say that this obviously isn't straightforward, and that there is no definitive list, but thinking about the kind of reasons that you might use for accepting some theories and rejecting others should be helpful both for your understanding of the Parthenon frieze and for your work on this course in general. (There will be a similar exercise in Block 3.)

Discussion

As I just said, there is no definitive list, as there are many ways of assessing interpretations. Let me draw up a list of my own here. Probably some criteria are more powerful or more workable than others, but I hope that you can roughly agree with me:

To what degree does the theory agree/conflict with the evidence? Does the frieze appear to portray the main figures and objects that would characterise the Panathenaia?

How reliable is the evidence that is used to support the theory? How much do we know about the Panathenaia, and from what sources? To what degree do we have to make leaps of faith since there isn't enough data to decide the issue?

How complete is the theory? Does it ignore important aspects of what I would like to have explained? Does it ignore some of the evidence? Can all figures on the frieze be matched onto the Panathenaia festival? Is there any ancient author talking about the frieze who is ignored by the Panathenaia theory?

Is the theory coherent/consistent in its own right? Does it make sense as such to say that the frieze depicts a festival? (An obvious question perhaps, but that only shows that it's a good theory in this respect.)

How far-fetched is the theory? How far-fetched is it to think that the Athenians would portray the Panathenaia on the Parthenon frieze?

How widely accepted is the theory? How much consensus is there among experts about the Panathenaia theory?

I have put down example questions that you could ask if you wanted to use my list to test the Panathenaia theory. If you have the time, you may at this

stage want to use your list – or a list based on my and your lists – to test several of the theories I have outlined. This might even change your views about which you think is a good theory.

Exercise

This sort of process is clearly at work in scholarship all the time. None the less, it hasn't led to a unanimous view on what sort of thing or things the Parthenon frieze portrays. So we come to our second group of interpreters. We find it impossible to determine with certainty what the Athenians thought about the Parthenon frieze, but is that just a problem of our evidence, or did the Athenians themselves also entertain multiple meanings? Did they have a clearer view of how to interpret the frieze, or did they toy with different possibilities themselves?

Take a few moments to think about how one might be able to answer these questions. Again, these aren't easy questions. Probably most of us would agree that art needn't have a clear single meaning, but that isn't quite the same as to say that one isn't sure whether the frieze is about the Panathenaic procession or about the Marathon fighters.

Discussion

Needless to say, this is yet another controversial issue. Let me outline my answer, but do be vigilant and ask yourself whether you agree or not.

First of all, I think that some blending of the distant world of myth and the real world of the fifth century BCE is perhaps inevitable if the frieze depicts a version of the Panathenaia, as most people, including me, believe. To start from myth: the context strongly suggests myth. As I said before, all other statuary on the temple is devoted to stories from myth, and that's what you would expect on a temple. Moreover, some elements of the frieze are clearly not fifth-century BCE reality. In particular, the twelve Olympian gods didn't take their seats on the Acropolis waiting for the procession to arrive – not Athena, and the other eleven even less so. And the preponderance of riders and chariots is easier to make sense of in a vague mythical world than in the fifth century BCE. Homeric heroes used chariots and, more generally, questions of 'élite v. non-élite' don't apply in the same way. At the same time, all that viewers knew from experience was the world

of the fifth century BCE, *their* world. Inevitably, the depiction of the Panathenaia used and evoked the reality that the Athenians were familiar with. We will probably never know whether spectators identified any individual figures as particular mythical characters (such as Erechtheus), but I think it's fair to say that they wouldn't identify *all* the figures. This is true for much public sculpture – when have you last stood in front of a complex public monument identifying the meaning of all the figures and other details? – and it's particularly true for the Parthenon frieze. After all, scholars have tried hard to match the entire frieze to a myth, but they have failed. In so far as the frieze is a depiction of the Panathenaia, it is likely to be a blend of real-world experiences and an imaginary world of gods and mythical heroes. It is neither a snapshot of something you would have seen in fifth-century BCE Athens nor a completely identifiable scene from myth. Rather, it is a blend of those two worlds.

You might say now that such a blend is just a fudge: a means of getting a contemporary event onto a temple where otherwise you wouldn't get away with it. What fascinates me about this fudge, though, is the rich opportunities it opens up. It allowed the artists to create images that are immediately relevant to the viewers, without being fully committed to representing reality. This freedom can be used in various ways. Let me give you one example. You probably remember my brief remarks about the political implications of the frieze. Is it, scholars ask, a democratic and egalitarian celebration of Athens, or is it mostly élitist? Do the idealised faces and the variety of participants express democracy, or does the predominance of cavalry and chariots reflect an aristocratic point of view? I'm not sure whether anyone can answer this question once and for all. However, what the blended world of myth and reality does is give a sense of vagueness to the scene that makes any political overtones less explicit. No doubt, the horsiness of the procession could and would be interpreted as élitist. But, equally, it could and I think would be interpreted as characteristic of a distant heroic world, like that of Homer, in which chariots had a crucial role in battle (and, I would add, in which gods mingled with humans). This distant world wouldn't just be élitist; it would also be the shared past of all Athenians. Blending the mythical and the real doesn't just make the Panathenaia an acceptable topic for a temple frieze; it also gave Pheidias freedom and opportunities.

So, did the frieze have multiple meanings to the Athenians? Well, I think within limits (i.e. not Odysseus' homecoming, and probably not *all* theories advanced by modern scholars) – yes. I suspect that at least

some, perhaps most, Athenians would have felt that the frieze wasn't *just* a depiction of the real Panathenaia, or *just* a depiction of the 'Proto-Panathenaia', or of anything else. In this sense there *was* a multiplicity of meanings. However, I should add that I don't think there were multiple meanings in the sense that people asked (as we today might ask): 'So was it the real Panathenaia or the "Proto-Panathenaia", then?', answering: 'I don't know – it's unclear.' I have tried to suggest that this is a matter not of 'either ... or' but of 'both ... and'. The frieze doesn't leave it open as to whether its theme is a mythical or a real-life event: it depicts both. And that's part of its power.

I would like to end by urging you once more to be critical. In a way, what I did in this last discussion is advance yet another interpretation of the frieze, and you should take your criteria and test it. I don't think it matters whether you go along with me all the way or not. What matters is that you think through the complexities of discussing the frieze. Multiple meanings for whom? Multiple meanings in what sense? Thinking through these issues will not only help you come to terms with this extraordinary work of art from fifth-century BCE Athens. It will also stand you in good stead thinking about many other works surviving from the Classical world and indeed other times and places.

2.7 Review

Exercise

Now watch DVD2, Section 3, 'The Acropolis and its buildings'. This will help you to recap on many of the buildings and issues you have worked through in this part.



Exercise

And finally, to finish off your work on this part of the block, read Essay Four, 'Self and society in Classical Athens' by James Robson. This essay uses a range of sources to examine issues which are central to this block. Reading this essay will provide you with an important opportunity to consolidate the work you have already done on fifth-century BCE Athens and, in addition, will help you to build the knowledge and skills you will need to tackle your next TMA.



References

Ancient sources

- Herodotus, *The Histories* 6.117, in A. de Sélincourt (trans.), revised by J. Marincola (2003) *Herodotus: The Histories*, London: Penguin.
- Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.10, in R. Crawley (trans.) (1997) *Thucydides: The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions.

Modern scholarship

- Boardman, J. (1977) 'The Parthenon frieze – another view', in U. Höckmann and A. Krug (eds), *Festschrift für Frank Brommer*, Mainz: von Zabern, pp.39–49.
- Connelly, J.B. (1996) 'Parthenon and *parthenoi*: a mythological interpretation of the Parthenon frieze', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol.100, no.1, pp.58–80.
- Neils, J. (2001) *The Parthenon Frieze*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Osborne, R. (1987) 'The viewing and obscuring of the Parthenon frieze', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol.107, pp.98–105.
- Parker, R. (2000) 'Panathenaia', in *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, vol.9, pp.230–1, Stuttgart: Metzler.

Further reading

Modern scholarship

- Beard, M. (2002) *The Parthenon*, London: Profile Books. A very readable short book about the Parthenon, focusing in particular on its afterlife.
- Hooker, G.T.W. (ed.) (1963) 'Parthenos and Parthenon', in *Greece and Rome*, vol.10, Oxford: Clarendon Press. A set of short essays on the Parthenon by different authors – some of them a little dated now.
- Hurwit, J.M. (1999) *The Athenian Acropolis: History, Mythology, and Archaeology from the Neolithic Era to the Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A reliable account of the Acropolis, with sections on all the major buildings.
- Hurwit, J.M. (2004) *The Acropolis in the Age of Pericles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. An abridged and updated version of Hurwit's earlier book.
- Jenkins, I. (1994) *The Parthenon Frieze*, London: British Museum Press. A short book devoted just to the frieze.
- Neils, J. (2001) *The Parthenon Frieze*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A much more detailed book on the frieze.

Part 3 The Funeral Speech (*Epitaphios Logos*)

3.1 Introduction

The admiration of the present and succeeding ages will be ours, since we have not left our power without witness, but have shown it by mighty proofs ...

(Pericles in Thucydides 2.41)

Your study in this part is of a famous document, the Funeral Speech, attributed to the Athenian leader Pericles by the Athenian historian Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Thucydides 2.34–46). I have chosen it for special study because of its importance for the history of the Athenians and its subsequent influence. It is a powerful rhetorical piece that provides an immediate and vivid insight into the circumstances of the public funeral for the war dead, a major annual event in Athens during the war with the Spartans. It is an important piece of evidence for study of the Athenian sense of identity, and especially of the way in which the Athenians represented themselves and others. In addition, both the occasion of the speech – the public funeral – and the values expressed in it have made the speech influential in later times. On a basic level, it has often been described as an expression of ‘what made Athens great’ and has been interpreted as an icon for civic and imperial values. On a more detailed level, it has influenced the composition and interpretation of public speeches for similar occasions in later centuries. Themes such as the relationship between private and public mourning, the roles of the family and the community in lamenting and commemorating, and the attitude of the community and the state to those who have been killed in battle provide links and points of comparison between societies of different times, places and cultures.

The Funeral Speech in Thucydides (in Greek, the *Epitaphios Logos* or *Epitaphios* for short) is part of a much longer historical narrative and analysis. Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* is conventionally divided into eight books and the Funeral Speech occurs about a third of the way through the second book. However, the Speech itself is self-contained. For this reason, in introducing it I am going to adopt a different approach from those you have encountered previously in this block. Instead of providing a detailed contextual introduction to the Peloponnesian War, to Thucydides as a historian or even to Pericles as an individual, I shall, after minimal introductory comment, ask you to get stuck in straight away and read the speech for yourself, noting your response. This will enable you to

get a sense of its overall shape and the main ideas it contains. You will also be able to assess the initial impact the speech makes on you.

This stress on close reading is an essential first step in the process of understanding and interpreting any historical document or literary text – and the Funeral Speech is both of these. You need to form a (very provisional) view of its structure, subject matter and internal coherence, and to begin to become sensitive to the kinds of language used (such as narrative, description, allusion to people and places, words of commendation and other value words), so that you can relate these patterns to the broader function of the document, which in the case of a speech includes its actual or intended audience. Since you already have some experience of using the *OCCC* and *BHAG* as reference points for factual and background information, you should at some point during or after your initial reading of the Speech have these books to hand.

This part of the block is laid out in four sections (following this introduction) and I have assumed that you will spend about two and a half hours on each section. You may wish to spend a little more time on the initial reading and note-taking in the first section and on the additional reading and thinking in Section 3.3. The other sections contain a relatively small amount of new reading, so you should have plenty of time to spend on the exercises, which will invite you to do a good deal of reflection and sceptical thinking.



For this work you will be using English translations of the text of the Funeral Speech and other readings from Thucydides and Greek sources (all of which are in Readings Book 1). You will find it especially useful to look at the entries on Pericles, Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War in the *OCCC*. There is no separate entry under ‘funerals’ but you will find some relevant material in the entries on ‘dead (disposal of)’ and ‘death (attitudes to)’. For other examples of funeral speeches you need to look under ‘*Epitaphios*’ – this does not appear in the *OCCC* but can be found in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edn, 1996). For definition and pronunciation, look on the course website (follow the ‘ICT’ link and select ‘Pronunciation’). Literally, this Greek word combines *epi* (‘over’) and *taphos* (‘tomb’ or ‘burial’, both in the sense of grave and in the sense of the act of burying). When used with *epitaphios*, the word *logos* means ‘speech’.

For Sections 3.2 and 3.5, you will be listening to CD3, ‘Funeral speeches ancient and modern’, and there will be an optional internet search at the end of Section 3.5.

The four sections of this part of the block will involve close reading of the Funeral Speech and close listening to the readings on CD3, as well as an exploration of the contexts of the Speech and comparison with other ancient texts. Later, I will discuss analyses of the context and ways in which

the Speech has been interpreted and reread subsequently; I will also take a brief look at some examples of the ways in which the Funeral Speech as a genre, and the Periclean version in particular, have been used at other public funerals in modern times (CD3 contains some extracts).

By the time you have worked through this week's material, you should have a good knowledge of the structure and content of the Periclean Funeral Speech. You should be able to relate it to its different kinds of context (see Course Introduction, Section 2.3, 'Ancient sources'), especially its place in the narrative in Book 2 of Thucydides, its historical context within the Peloponnesian War and its cultural and political context in the democracy. You will also be aware that the *Epitaphios* has influenced other speeches and their interpretation and you should be able to make comparisons and contrasts with examples of these, both ancient and modern. Through close reading and analysis, and through thinking about these aspects, you should then be able to form your own reasoned judgements about the extent to which Pericles' words about Athens refer to an actual or to an idealised situation. You should also be able to identify and comment on similarities and differences between the Funeral Speech in Thucydides and other examples.

A note on style

This is the first point in the course at which you study an extended piece of prose. Prose is a genre that has come to be particularly associated with the fifth century BCE because of the historical writing of Herodotus and Thucydides. However, sixth-century BCE scientists also wrote in prose, so the historians were not the first (Goldhill, 2002). It is often thought that prose is more 'factual' than poetry. However, this is not necessarily the case. It is true that Thucydides' style is 'severe' and his language is often abstract rather than metaphorical, but his language and structure are complex. He uses scientific terms but also employs forms that you will find in drama – for example, single and paired speeches. Recent research has also suggested that there may be a stylistic and ideological relationship between some of Thucydides' historical writing and the victory odes of the poet Pindar (Hornblower, 2004). So it is worth being very attentive to Thucydides' style, and especially to the ways in which his prose narrative and carefully crafted speeches work on the reader to influence the way in which we see the individuals and situations he presents.

3.2 Reading the Funeral Speech in Thucydides

In Book 2 of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides gives an account of the first year of the war between the Athenians and the Spartans. In Chapter 34 he describes the context for the annual funeral ceremony for

the war dead. In Chapters 35–46 he gives Pericles' oration in direct speech. In Chapter 47 the historian makes the transition to the next part of his narrative. This way of proceeding is characteristic of Thucydides. The lengthy public speeches that are a feature of his work are usually introduced by a short piece of narrative giving the immediate context, and are followed by another short narrative which concludes the episode and allows the account of the war to move on. It is generally accepted that much of this book of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* is a relatively late composition and may reflect hindsight. (Thucydides died sometime soon after the Athenian defeat in 404 BCE. His *History* includes events up until 411 BCE and then breaks off unfinished.)

Exercise



Now read Thucydides 2.34 in the English translation by Richard Crawley (the first paragraph of Reading 2.8). Crawley's translation was first published in 1874 and the language should help you to distance the event slightly from modern conventions. As you read, make short notes on the following questions:

- Who were the dead?
- Who could attend the funeral?
- Who took part in it?
- Who paid for it?
- What kind of preparations and ceremonies were there?
- Is there any significance in where the funeral took place?

Discussion

I have included in my discussion some additional points that you would not have been expected to pick up at this stage without looking at a book such as Simon Hornblower's *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol.1.

Clearly this was a major public ceremonial and it was publicly funded. The funeral was for those killed fighting for Athens in the first year of the war and it was an annual event (see Figures 2.19 and 2.20). The bodies of those killed were actually buried at or near the battle site, so it was the bones that were returned to Athens. Note that Marathon is not in fact the only instance of bodies being buried where they fell: the battles of Salamis and Plataea are other examples. Thucydides'



Figures 2.19 and 2.20 The soldier's farewell, from an Athenian white-ground *lekythos* by the Achilles painter, c.440 BCE. National Museum, Athens (height 42.5cm) (Inv 561.0293, 561,0294). Photo: Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Germany. *Lekythoi* were slender oil-flasks dedicated as grave offerings.

wording here seems designed to show how special the occasion was. However, some historians have questioned whether the tradition of a public funeral was as old as he suggests – it may have dated only from the 460s BCE. The reference to ‘the coffin of their tribe’ is to the ten tribes or divisions into which the citizens had been organised in the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes. The reference thus suggests that only Athenians were given a *polis* funeral. However, non-Athenians, including ‘barbarian archers’, are mentioned on the casualty lists.

Those whose bodies had not been recovered were also represented by a communal coffin. Notice that, before the ceremony, the bones of the dead lay in one place for three days and families observed their private rituals there and not at home or in family burial places. Anyone could attend the funeral and there was a special role for female relatives who lamented at the burial. Lament at funerals was sometimes noisy, even spectacular, and was traditionally a role for women – the family rituals mentioned by Thucydides mark an

accommodation of private family traditions to the public sphere. A public figure gave an oration and burial was in the state tomb (the *demosion sema*) in the *Kerameikos* (referred to in DVD2, Section 3, 'The Acropolis and its buildings'). Thucydides refers to this as the most beautiful suburb of the city, a rare comment on the environment in his work.

Exercise



Now read the entire Funeral Speech (Chapters 35–46 in Reading 2.8). (You may also choose to listen to it on CD3, Tracks 2–5 now or to save that until later.) As you read, make short notes on what Pericles is represented as saying about the following:

- the dead (including general comments and anything on individuals or groups)
- ancestors
- the relationship between the form of government and ordinary life in Athens
- social and cultural life in Athens
- military matters
- the enemies of the Athenians
- other Greek states
- commemoration of the dead
- advice to the relatives (parents, sons, brothers, widows)
- orphans

Does anything strike you about the *shape/structure* of the speech and the *language* used?

Discussion

There is a complete lack of reference to any named individuals or fighting units (see Figure 2.21) – you may remember that this was also the case in Aeschylus' *Persians*. The point is made rhetorically at 35 that justice could not be done to them, but the effect of the omission is to stress communality and especially citizenship, and to avoid any rupture of social unity. In fact, many of the dead in the first year of the war are thought to have been cavalry and therefore predominantly from the upper classes.



Figure 2.21 Base with the Marathon Epigrams. American School of Classical Studies at Athens; Agora Excavations. The inscription is from a fragment of the base of a memorial erected in Athens to the dead of Marathon. Restoration of this piece together with another fragment and a fourth-century BCE copy indicates that the piece probably read:

The courage of these men will shine forever as a permanent light
 To those whom the gods may in future grant success in deeds of war
 For on foot and in fast sailing ships
 They kept all Greece from seeing a day of slavery.

The sections on the constitution in Chapter 37 stress democracy and equality before the law. Links are drawn with freedom in ordinary life, protection under the law and social values that emphasise public prosperity – enhanced by the power of the Athenian naval empire in bringing in resources from the ‘allies’ and promoting trade. In 38 the praise of leisure (associated with elegance and pleasure) is combined with emphasis on the economic benefits brought to the city by its culture. In 39 explicit contrasts are drawn with other cities and specifically with the Spartans (here, Lacedaemonians), especially in terms of education and military arrangements – note the insistence that naval and land forces work in collaboration. In Athens, the sailors

were drawn from among the poorer citizens, the middling people were hoplites (infantry) and the richest were cavalry.

Chapter 40 returns to the theme of public culture introduced in 38 and extends this to politics, explicitly addressing the duties of the citizen as participant, including both the wealthy and ordinary men ('unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless'). Chapter 41 is strongly focused on the creation and activities of the *archē* (naval empire) and on willingness to take risks ('we have forced every sea and land to be the highway of our daring'). The celebration of military values in 42 emphasises doing harm to enemies and choosing death with honour over a life of submission to the enemy. In 43 Pericles takes up the theme of praise of the dead from which he retreated in 35, and relates their virtues to those he has associated in the previous section with the democracy and the *archē*.

In Chapter 44, his advice to the relatives is sternly practical. They are to produce replacement sons (these could also be acquired through adoption) and to rejoice in the fame of those they have lost. Sons and brothers are to try to emulate the dead. Male orphans would be brought up at the public expense – those entering the army were paraded at the Great (or City) Dionysia festival. Widows are to keep a low profile and not to provoke gossip. This admonition may be partly a caution against excessive mourning, traditionally associated with women (especially in upper-class families) who might compete in displays of grief. It may also be a reference to the fact that widows of cavalymen would be from more affluent families and therefore the subject of talk about remarriage.

Notice the firm closure – 'you have brought to a close your lamentation' – and the way in which the speech is structured: Pericles has introduced various themes in order, culminating in the praise of the Athenian military ethos and pursuit of empire. He then returns over these in reverse order until the closing advice.

Exercise

On the basis of your detailed study, now write a few sentences summarising your response to the content and tone of the Speech. How would you describe it to someone who had not read it before? Lament? Consolation? Commemoration? Statement of national unity? Celebration of the democracy? Celebration of the empire? (You may want to use a combination of these.) Would you describe it as a

boastful speech, a confident speech, a persuasive speech? Was there anything missing that you might have expected to find (such as religious references)?

Discussion

As these notes are your own response, I have not provided any discussion here. But in the next sections we will be looking at Pericles' Speech in comparison with other texts, so keep your notes by you.

At this point, if you have not already done so, listen to the recording of the Speech on CD3, Tracks 2–15 and also consult the notes in Readings Book 1 on the translator, Richard Crawley (see Reading 2.9). Think about the extent to which the fact that this is a Victorian translation may have affected your analysis of the words and phrasing.



3.3 Pericles' Funeral Speech and other ancient speeches

Contexts for the Funeral Speech

Within Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War

Thucydides included the Speech as part of the longer study in Book 2 of the early period of the war between the Athenians and the Spartans. This war is conventionally known as the Peloponnesian War, although in fact it was one of a succession of conflicts, by no means all of which were in the Peloponnese. This phase (often called the Archidamian War, after the Spartan king and military leader Archidamus) began in 431 BCE and lasted for ten years. In 421 BCE there was a truce and the war resumed in 415 BCE, continuing until 404 BCE when the Athenians were defeated, their naval empire was destroyed and their democracy was temporarily overthrown (see Figures 2.22 and 2.23 for images of contemporary warriors). It is a feature of Thucydides' technique that he juxtaposes the set-piece speeches very carefully with what has gone before and what follows. After the Funeral Speech he leads straight from the dry observation in 2.47 that 'such was the funeral that took place during this winter' into an account of the plague which soon struck Athens, aggravated by the overcrowding by refugees from the countryside who had flocked to the city. Thucydides gives a graphic account of the illness (from which he himself recovered but Pericles died) and describes how burial rituals were abandoned, law and order broke down and values and unwritten laws were shattered ('Fear of gods or law of man there was none to restrain them', 2.53).



Figure 2.22 Red-Figure Calyx-Krater, attributed to the Berlin painter, South Italian, Apulia, 440–20 BCE; terracotta, depicting a Spartan hoplite confronting a mounted spearman. Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, anonymous gift (2002.0.204).

In the earlier part of Book 2 (especially 13–24), Thucydides writes of the Athenian experiences in the first year of the war and especially of the threatening presence of the Spartan army in the rural areas of Attica, notably at Acharnae (or Acharnai) which was only seven miles (about 11.2 kilometres) from Athens (see Colour Plate 8 in the Illustrations Book). This led the Acharnians to prepare for military action there and considerable blame was heaped on Pericles, who had advocated a policy of military caution, advising the citizens to evacuate the rural areas, retreat into the city and fortify it and rely on the navy as their best resource (Book 2.13; see also Colour Plate 9 in the Illustrations Book). Matters were not helped by the fact that the Spartan leader Archidamus was a close friend of Pericles (*xenos* or ‘guest-friend’, as you may remember from Block 1). Fearing that



Figure 2.23 Warrior arming, on an Attic white-ground *lekythos*, by the Achilles painter, Cyprus, c.450 BCE; height 39.4cm (BM.D51). © The Trustees of The British Museum.

Archidamus might bypass his country estates instead of destroying them, Pericles gave them to the *polis* (Book 2.13). Thus, by placing the Funeral Speech where he does, Thucydides contrasts the aggression and confident energy of Pericles' words with the uneasy situation in Athens in the early part of the war and with the disaster of the plague that was to come.

If you have the time, you might like to do some optional reading here:



- Thucydides 2.13–14; 1.21–2, 2.47–54 (Readings 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12)
- Pericles and the growth of Athenian democracy, *BHAG*, pp.145–8



- The Peloponnesian War, *BHAG*, pp.200–4

Later in Book 2, Thucydides goes on to describe how, in the light of these setbacks, the Athenians wanted to make peace with Sparta and turned against Pericles. He was forced to defend himself in what is generally known as his Last Speech (2.59–65, a section of the work which includes Thucydides' account of the Speech and his extensive concluding comments). The historian was a great admirer of Pericles and in his narrative castigates the Athenians for not following his policies.

Exercise



Now read at least Chapters 59 and 64–65 in Reading 2.13.

Discussion

Note how Thucydides, who was not in sympathy with the developed democracy, refers to Pericles' leadership as 'government by the first citizen'. Thucydides comments that the vast resources the Athenians had gained from the empire could have ensured victory if they had been properly used.

Other ancient funeral speeches

The Athenians had a tradition in funeral speeches that was said to be unique. The one attributed to Pericles is the earliest extant example. Demosthenes, the fourth-century BCE orator, wrote that 'they [the Athenians] alone in the world deliver funeral orations for citizens who have died for their country' (*Against Leptines* 141).

Exercise



Now read the passages in Readings 2.14 (a) and (b) and 2.15:

- 1 A fragmentary example attributed to Gorgias, the Sicilian Rhetorician, who wrote both model and commissioned speeches. This could date from any time between 427 BCE (when Gorgias

first visited Athens) and 376 BCE, when he died. Some critics think that the speech in Thucydides and that attributed to Gorgias show similarities. Can you spot any affinities?

- 2 An extract from the philosophical dialogue *Menexenus*, sometimes attributed to Plato. What is the tone here?

Discussion

- 1 There seems to be an emphasis in the 'Gorgias' speech on justice and values compatible with democracy; on response to challenge and implacable opposition to enemies. All these are comparable with Pericles' Speech. The recognition of envy and other human feelings is also comparable with Thucydides' general approach to discussion of human affairs, though these themes only lurk beneath the surface in Pericles' Speech. In Gorgias' speech there is attention to the gods, which is lacking in Pericles' – and this is juxtaposed with the emphasis on the powers and virtues of ordinary human men. The reference to the lack of power to convey what the author wishes is surely disingenuous.
- 2 The extract from the *Menexenus* is from a different kind of document. This is a philosophical discussion attributed to the philosopher Plato, in which his teacher Socrates explores issues of philosophical and political moment. The authorship of the work has been doubted by many scholars but this does not affect its value as a source for the social and cultural history of the *epitaphios* as a genre. The *Menexenus* refers to a supposed speech composed by Aspasia, Pericles' companion, in about 430 BCE (although the dialogue itself was not composed until c.380 BCE; this suggests that the fame of Pericles' oration had lasted). The tone seems to be ironic. Notice the stress on the power of words to deceive and on the ways in which ordinary (and even ignoble) men can be given heroic status that they do not deserve. In 235 the 'feel-good factor' is emphasised, as is the propaganda effect on foreigners. The passage could be a coded comment on spin in public oratory, and the likelihood that it is a satirical attack on Pericles' speech is increased by the reference to Aspasia. She was Pericles' mistress, a non-Athenian and a sophisticated woman who had her own intellectual circle (contrast Pericles' reference in Thucydides 2.45 to the need for women to be spoken of as little as possible).

Exercise



Listen now to the readings of these ancient sources on CD3, Tracks 16–17, 18–20 and 28–30.



Other speeches in Thucydides

The Funeral Speech and Pericles' Last Speech (2.59–65, including Thucydides' comments) are distinctive within Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* because they are examples of single speeches that are not paired with opponents in a contested debate. The same is true of Pericles' speech to the Athenians on the issue of whether they should go to war (1.140–4, with Thucydides' comments in 139 and 145). All of the three speeches of Pericles recorded by Thucydides are addressed directly to the Athenians and have the purpose of uniting the citizen body. The Funeral Speech may have been heard by non-citizens. The other speeches were made to the Assembly. Most of the rest of the speeches included in Thucydides are in debates and are presented in opposing pairs. A good example is the clash in the Assembly between Cleon and Diodotus after the revolt of Mytilene (428–427 BCE). Cleon was one of the men who succeeded Pericles as a leader of the Athenians. The Mytilene debate in Thucydides is described in *BHAG* (pp.204–6) and has become a symbol of the way the Athenians tried to dominate their empire (notionally their allies) under the pressures of war. Read this summary now.

Another important example of a policy debate was that between the rival politicians Nicias and Alcibiades in 415 BCE, prior to the disastrous Athenian expedition to Sicily, which set in train the events that eventually led to defeat by Sparta. The context, the debate and the aftermath are summarised in *BHAG* (pp.213–17, optional reading). Two points are important. First, policy debates are presented by Thucydides as debates between leading contenders for power, who have to use their skills in rhetoric to persuade the citizens to vote for them and for the course of action they are recommending. Secondly, Thucydides uses those speeches to highlight key moments of crisis or decision. They have an almost theatrical atmosphere. (This is a point we shall return to later in the block in the context of Essay Five, 'Performance, competition and democracy in Athenian culture'.)

The historical accuracy of Thucydides' account: some key questions

How accurate is Thucydides as a reporter?

One question that has probably already occurred to you is how we can be sure that what Thucydides recorded is accurate. You will have discovered

from the *OCCC* that he was a participant in the war, being *strategos* in 424 BCE, and that he failed in battle at Amphipolis, as a result of which he was exiled for twenty years, returning to Athens only after the end of the war. For events in Athens before 424 BCE he may have been an eye witness or had access to reliable accounts or documents. So far as composition of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* is concerned, scholars generally agree that the account of the Funeral Speech delivered in the first year of the war was actually written quite late, possibly even after the fall of Athens in 404 BCE. You have already read enough of the contextual material in Book 2 to gain a sense of the way in which Thucydides is standing back from events and shaping them into a pattern. This suggests the advantages of hindsight and also that the historian had worked out his own interpretation of how and why the Athenians were defeated.

In the introductory section to his work, Thucydides describes his methods – how he checked reports and in particular how he composed the speeches:

Some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one's memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.

(Thucydides 1.22)

The last clauses of this are ambiguous, and there has been much debate over whether Thucydides means that he reconstructed what the speakers probably said, or what he considers they *ought* to have said (bearing in mind his own analysis of underlying trends, causes and motivations).

Were Pericles' claims true?

In respect of the Funeral Speech, with its seemingly authoritative claims about the nature of Athenian society and its values, there is of course a further level at which we have to evaluate reliability. Even if Thucydides has represented Pericles' words accurately, how can the speech best be evaluated? To what extent can we make judgements about whether the politician's claims were true? It is certainly the case that Pericles' claims about the Athenians, their democracy and their way of life contain few assertions that can conclusively be proved or disproved. It seems to me that Pericles' claims are of three main kinds:

- 1 claims about participation in the democracy;
- 2 claims about the nature of the Athenians and their achievements (e.g. Chapter 39);

- 3 claims about how future generations would judge the Athenians (e.g. Chapter 41).



If you look at the entry under ‘democracy, Athenian’ in the *OCCC*, pp.220–25, you will find a very different kind of description of the democracy and its history and institutions, much of it based on evidence from the fourth century BCE, when the democracy was revived after the interruption at the end of the Peloponnesian War. I would say that much of this admittedly patchy evidence is perfectly compatible with Pericles’ claims, but nevertheless his speech is more about the *ethos* (character) of the democracy rather than about how it actually worked in practice.

Nevertheless, you can test some of Pericles’ claims against other evidence concerning the workings of the democracy. For instance, the obligations attached to citizenship meant that the democracy was indeed strongly oriented towards active participation. Citizens (males from the age of eighteen years) were liable for military service (for which an allowance was paid) according to their socio-economic class. The better-off were liable for the *eisphora*, a property tax used for war finance (see Thucydides 3.19). But all citizens had a direct say in whether the *polis* should go to war. They could attend the meetings of the Assembly in Athens and address it if they wished (attendance was voluntary and unpaid until about 400 BCE). They could also attend and vote at ostracisms – a process held in the *agora* through which unpopular politicians could be exiled (see Colour Plate 10 in the Illustrations Book – you touched on this subject in Part 1 on *Persians* and will return to it in Part 4 of this block). From the age of thirty, citizens were eligible for appointment by lot to official posts (through which they could benefit from the prosperity brought by the *archē*) and to serve on the Council (*boulē*). Only the top military and financial posts were filled by election. The other important institutional role for citizens was service on juries. Pericles himself introduced pay for this after about 462–461 BCE and this was raised in 425 BCE to maintain the equivalent of half a day’s pay for a craftsman. It was later suggested in the Aristotelian *Constitution of Athens* that the institution of pay increased the participation of ordinary citizens (whose enthusiasm for this was lampooned by Aristophanes in his play *Wasps*).

Richer Athenians also undertook liturgies, or public services, such as the equipment of a warship (see Figure 2.24) and training of its crew or the training of a Chorus for the dramatic festivals. So Pericles’ stress in the *Epitaphios* on the importance of active participation in civic activity is borne out by the evidence. However, there is also a political edge to his remarks. Research has shown that there was some unwillingness among peasant farmers to adopt the degree of urbanisation necessary for full participation in the democracy and that rich aristocrats, who already enjoyed reputation

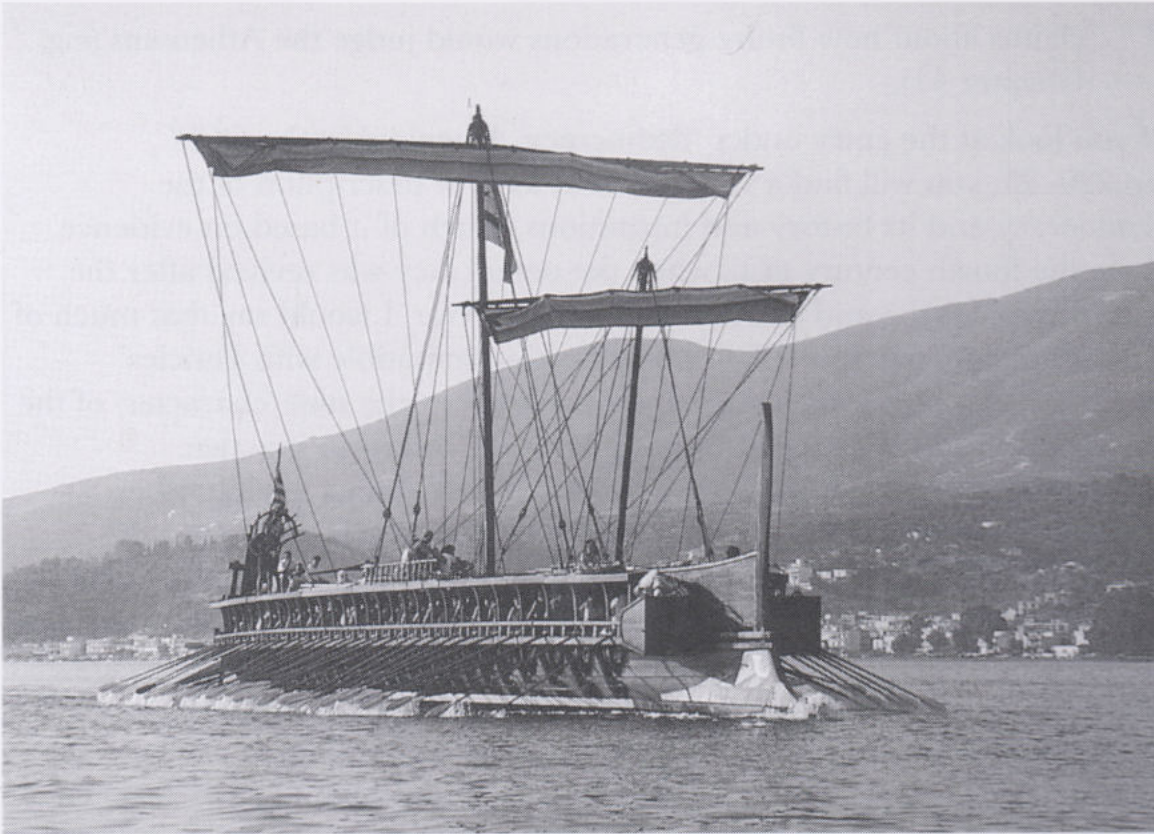


Figure 2.24 *Olympias*, the reconstruction of the Athenian trireme launched in 1987, undergoing sea-trials in the Saronic Gulf. Photo: Alexandra Guest. © The Trireme Trust. The ship was built following co-operation between naval architects and classicists, who used evidence from sculpture, literary sources and marine archaeology.

and status, were unwilling to hazard themselves and their property in the vagaries of the political arena of the democracy or to support the risks of a naval empire which might destabilise their own inter-*polis* relationships. Both democracy and *archē* were in any case uncongenial to them (Carter, 1986). Such lack of participation could of course mask their political opposition to the war, to Pericles and even to the democracy, so Pericles' rejection of these inactive citizens (the *apragmones*, literally the 'do-nothings') could well have its basis in the immediate policy crisis of the first year of the war.

Evaluation of the second and third of Pericles' claims is more difficult. The second claim, concerning the nature of the Athenians and especially their daring and willingness to take risks, is really an attempt to persuade through value judgements. It reads like an appeal to the more aggressive elements in the debates about the war and the empire and has to be read against the suggestion by Thucydides that Pericles was at that time under attack, both for leading the Athenians into the war with Sparta and for his cautious policies and failure to defend the countryside. The third claim, about the lasting fame of the Athenians, is one which can be tested against

the various judgements made about them from antiquity onwards (including your own).

So the key question for us in analysing the *Epitaphios*, then, becomes one about how to interpret and evaluate the various claims that Pericles was making. This brings us to the subject of the next section, which is concerned with ways in which his speech has been recontextualised and reread.

3.4 Later recontextualisations and rereadings

Since Pericles' speech was made on a major public occasion and followed the relatively new and uniquely Athenian tradition of funeral oratory, it is reasonable to assume that the basic sentiments expressed would not run violently contrary to ideas and values that were familiar.

Modern scholarship has followed two main lines of enquiry about the content and significance of the speech in relation to the situation at Athens. These two approaches are related but distinct. The first was developed by the French historian Nicole Loraux in an influential book *The Invention of Athens: the Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (first published in French 1981, English translation 1986). Drawing on research she undertook for her doctoral dissertation in the 1970s, Loraux situated the Funeral Speech of Pericles within the broader tradition of Athenian funeral orations. She drew on the work of J.E. Ziolkowski, who in his 1963 thesis had produced a detailed analysis of the formal structure of the Speech in Thucydides and compared it with other extant examples of the genre (eventually published as *Thucydides and the Tradition of Funeral Speeches at Athens*, 1981). Ziolkowski showed that the Speech in Thucydides contained much less material on remote ancestors or semi-mythical genealogy than was the case with other examples. The emphasis in Thucydides, he argued, was on the fathers of the present generation (the men of Marathon) and on the founders of the Athenian *archē*. Loraux refined this approach to suggest that Pericles was creating a 'new mythology', an idealised wish-fulfilling view of the Athenian *polis* in which the orator expresses the aspirations of the living, and the dead are glorified by their association with this civic ideal. She finds in the Speech a more abstract conception of the *polis*, and notes that while other fifth-century BCE authors such as Aeschylus and Herodotus speak of the city in terms of its citizens, Thucydides in general, and the *Epitaphios* in particular, place the emphasis on its power. Loraux argues that in this sense the values and status of the city are an 'invention'; that is, they are constructed in terms of the aspirations of its citizens. Similar sentiments are found in other texts (such as Euripides' plays *Suppliant Women* 5–15 and 409–18 and *Medea* 827; see Essay Four, 'Self and society in Classical Athens').

This kind of analysis leaves open the question of whether Pericles was speaking on his own behalf as a politician, as well as articulating the sentiments of the community – in other words, was he reflecting or shaping public opinion? The second main strand of investigation of the Speech by historians anchors it in Athenian realpolitik. In the absence of the possibility of cross-checks on other primary sources, such as interviews and diaries which are not available to ancient historians, we can never know Pericles' own thoughts directly (nor of course the reactions of those who listened to him). However, as you have already found out, the Speech is carefully located by Thucydides within Book 2. Loraux claimed in support of her judgements (p.298) that the Funeral Speech was the only speech in Thucydides that was not necessary to the unfolding of the narrative. It did not, for example, refer to a 'moment of decision' as did Pericles' other speeches or the speeches in the Mytilene and Sicilian debates, and she therefore concluded that its register and tone were characteristic of an 'invention'.

However, it can be argued against Loraux that the speech is indeed part of the narrative of the events of the first year of the war, and that it explains key aspects of it, including Pericles' strategy. The fact that the speech concentrates on the present (2.36) is an argument in favour of the immediate political relevance of the ideas expressed, especially the immediate impact on the Athenians (and foreigners) who were present. There is also contemporary urgency in Pericles' attempt both to honour a value system that included open democracy and to laud the prosperity brought by empire. He was claiming civic unity at home and promoting this as a basis for Athenian supremacy within Greece. These, as you discovered in the previous section, were contested issues. The original decision to go to war had been a contentious one and the events of the past year – especially the invasion of Attica and its effects on the rural inhabitants and the city itself (when it became crowded with refugees) – had shocked the citizens. If, as seems likely, some of the dead were cavalrymen from upper-class landowning families – whose prosperity was most affected by the ravaging of the countryside of Attica, and who had in any case perhaps initially been lukewarm about the war but now naturally opposed Pericles' virtual abandonment of the countryside to the invaders – then the funeral could have brought out deep-seated civic discontent (for further discussion of the evidence, see Hardwick, 1993).

It was also the case historically that funerals had provided occasions for the rich and influential to make a public show of their affluence and the numbers of mourners. The role of female mourners was a deeply embedded social institution and Thucydides indicates in his introduction to the *Epitaphios* that this was preserved ('the female mourners are there to

wail at the burial', 2.34). However, burial was not in family tombs but in the public cemetery. Thus it seems that, in the context of the war, it was in the interests of the leaders of the *polis*, especially Pericles, to keep control of the funeral arrangements for those who had been killed, rather than allowing a plethora of high-profile family funerals that might signal the disparity in resources between different social groups. Furthermore, we know from tragedy that lament, especially from the Chorus, was used to draw attention not just to dead heroes but also to the plight of victims, the suffering, the bereaved and also the defeated (see Section 1.4 of this block and Taxidou, 2004). So on this occasion lament could not be allowed to spiral out of control. As a recent study puts it:

A speech was required by Athenian convention, but the need for one was actual and pressing, since the Athenians had against their own instincts surrendered their countryside in reliance on the city's defences and their navy, and they had just suffered their first losses in the war, unbalanced by any appreciable gains; Thucydides let there be no mistake about their resentment of Pericles and their impulse to break from his policy.

(Price, 2001, pp.172–3)

From this point of view, Pericles was using his oratorical skills to unite the citizens and to preserve his own position. The funeral of the war dead was a public performance that had to be stage-managed.

You will need to think through the question of which approach to Pericles' speech you find the more illuminating. I incline towards thinking that both are significant and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is perfectly possible that the speech was made out of historical and political necessity *and* that it constructed an abstract ideal *and* that Thucydides coloured it in the light of his own interpretation of the political situation and in the context of his knowledge of the eventual outcome for Athens. At the same time, Pericles' response to the situation at home and abroad did articulate a new political vision, presenting the *polis* as a focus of unity for all sections of society and projecting a dynamic image of Athens as exemplary or even unique in Greece, in terms of its developed democracy and freedom, its military and education systems, its daring and its values. So this is another example of the 'multiple meanings' that you discussed in relation to the Parthenon frieze (see Section 2.6). The knack is to decide whether multiple meanings are compatible or mutually exclusive! There is an almost obsessive sense of comparison and competition with the rest of Greece. Both the city and its inhabitants are transformed as a result of this special way of life, this 'Athenianism'. It is of course a deeply ideological document and later critics have pointed out the totalitarian implications of this subsuming of individual identity and freedom into that of the *polis*.

Exercise

At this point, refer back to the notes and summary of impressions that you made after your first reading of the *Epitaphios*. Do you want to add to or revise any of your initial responses? If so, on what grounds?

Discussion

You will provide your own answers here. Make sure that you can give reasons for any changes in your views – and equally that you can give reasons if you decide to stick to your original ideas.

3.5 Public funerals in modern times

In this final section you will be asked to look at examples of modern orations delivered by political leaders on occasions of mourning for dead soldiers. The first is the Gettysburg Address, delivered by President Abraham Lincoln on 19 November 1863, during the American Civil War at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery on the site of the battle (which took place in July 1863).

Exercise

Turn to the text of the Gettysburg Address in Reading 2.17, which you can also hear being read on CD3, Tracks 22–23. (The version used here is that of the final text. There is dispute about the extent to which the text was revised and reworked by Lincoln in advance of an engagement which he undertook at short notice.) Read and listen to the address and then make short notes on the following questions:



- How is the occasion described?
- What kinds of words are used to describe the dead?
- What kind of constitution and political values does Lincoln refer to?
- Is any information given about the civil war?
- Is there a sense of an enemy and what the enemy is like?
- What ideals are referred to? How concrete or abstract do you think they are?

Discussion

There is a total absence of discussion of the civil war, the actual battle, the constitution, property, slavery or any of the underlying issues of the conflict. As Garry Wills has put it (somewhat rhetorically):

The discussion is driven back and back, beyond the historical particulars, to great ideals that are made to grapple naked in an airy battle of the mind. Lincoln derives a new, transcendental significance from this bloody episode ... he means to 'win' the whole Civil War in ideological terms as well as military ones.

(Wills, 1992, p.37)

In contrast to Lincoln's address was the main speech of the ceremony, made by Edward Everett, president of Harvard and a leader of the Greek revival in nineteenth-century America. This was preceded and followed by music and prayers. You can read the opening sequence (Sections 1–5) of Everett's speech in Reading 2.18. He referred in detail to 'the Athenian example' and described the context and idealising spirit of Pericles' Speech in an entirely uncynical way. Notice Everett's stress on the earlier Battle of Marathon as a benchmark of Athenian identity – in this battle the dead were buried where they fell, as was the case at Gettysburg. Everett also described the victory over the Persians, in which Marathon was a key factor, as a victory over barbarians. Everett's speech then went on to talk about the beginning of the American Civil War in sections headed 'southern aggression' and 'northern response'. This was followed by a detailed account of the miseries and carnage of the battle of Gettysburg, including description of the care given to the wounded, and by an attack on the Confederacy and its 'rebellion'. Then there was a section on reconciliation and an appeal for solidarity among the Union states. The whole took two hours. You will find a (much shorter) extract on CD3, Tracks 24–25.

Lincoln's address has become an icon of democratic oratory, yet it makes few specific references to what democracy entails. The whole occasion, including the ceremonies and Everett's speech, is an interesting example of the influence of the Athenian tradition and its adaptation in the context of different circumstances and political priorities.

The next example, in Reading 2.19 and on CD3, Tracks 26–28, is a more recent example of the adaptation of the *epitaphios* genre. It is the only one where we have been able to include the voice of the original speaker. This

is the oration made by the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic, Mr Bertie Ahern TD, on the occasion of the Reinterment of the Remains of Volunteers executed during the Irish War of Independence (the official title of the speech does not mention that the men were executed by the British). After a ceremony in the Pro-Cathedral the reinterment took place in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, on Sunday 14 October 2001. After an introduction in Irish, the Taoiseach gave an account of the circumstances of the deaths of the ten men, with considerable attention to the immediate and broader contexts.

Exercise

Read and listen to this now, and make notes in response to the following questions:



- What aspects of the men's conduct are praised?
- What is said about the constitutional situation at the time of their deaths?
- What analogies are drawn with other movements for freedom and independence?
- What is the attitude to Irish relations with Britain at the time the speech was made (in 2001)?

Discussion

This was a great public occasion, covered live on RTE (Radio Telefis Eireann). Glasnevin Cemetery has long associations with the nationalist cause in Ireland, and was the scene of previous nationalist funeral orations. The speech is a carefully calculated political balancing act, referring specifically to 'a unifying occasion'. The Taoiseach summarised the legal and electoral legitimacy of the independence proclaimed by Dail Eireann (the Irish parliament) in 1919 and associated the Irish struggle with the American War of Independence and the struggle in India. He referred to the First World War (in which many Irish soldiers from both north and south were killed) as well as invoking the almost legendary ancestors of Irish independence such as Daniel O'Connell. He also took care to distance the executed volunteers from the later terrorists ('the actions of tiny minorities that happened long after their deaths'). He referred to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 that would, it was hoped, pave the

way for closer co-operation between the government in the Republic and the devolved Assembly in the north. Note that he referred to 'Great Britain' and not 'the United Kingdom' (which is short for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Unlike Pericles' *Epitaphios* and Everett's address, but like Lincoln's, there is no attempt to define the qualities of the dead against their opponents and no demonisation of an 'enemy', although staunch Unionists in the north of Ireland reacted strongly against the speech.

These examples demonstrate very clearly that the significance of Classical subjects is not confined to study of the ancient world but has a much broader role in the arts and humanities. The ways in which Greek and Roman texts, material culture and traditions have been interpreted, refined, adapted and appropriated in later contexts shed light on key aspects of culture and politics right up to the present day.

Exercise

So, finally, think about the principles on which comparison of different examples of the *epitaphios* genre can reasonably be made, both within antiquity and subsequently.

Discussion

I would suggest the following (you may well have different ones or want to suggest a different emphasis):

- occasion
- context
- place of delivery
- audience (actually present and further afield)
- authenticity and transmission of the text
- structure
- language (how people are described, how formal and conventional, how precise or abstract)
- references to religion
- references to the dead (by name or group)
- references to the families of the dead

- references to ancestors or other models for conduct
- references to civic, military and social values and practices
- references to enemies/opponents
- references to the future
- references, actual or implied (including through silence) to social or political tensions or difficulties that the speech might intend to resolve
- references to the kind of unity or commonality that is being created (and indications of those for whom and on behalf of whom it is being created)

You might also wish to add a comment on how to gauge the extent to which the Periclean Speech is explicitly or implicitly taken as a model and the significance of any overlaps or striking differences. It would be useful to discuss these principles of comparison with other students at a tutorial or self-help group. You could also find some other examples of public funeral or interment orations and see how well your methods work. Here are two suggestions that you could research on the web:

- 1 Burial of the Unknown Warrior (Westminster Abbey, 11 November 1920). There are similar examples in most countries.
- 2 Funeral of the Cradock Four (20 July 1985, Eastern Cape, South Africa). For the importance of the funeral in African society, socially and politically, see Mda (1995).



References

Ancient sources

Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.22, in R. Crawley (trans.) (1997) *Thucydides: The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions.

Modern scholarship

Carter, L.B. (1986) *The Quiet Athenian*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goldhill, S. (2002) 'The invention of prose', *New Surveys in the Classics*, no.32, Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Classical Association.

Hardwick, L. (1993) 'Philomel and Pericles: silence in the Funeral Speech', *Greece and Rome*, vol.40, no.2, pp.147–62.

Hornblower, S. (1991) *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2 vols.

- Hornblower, S. (2004) *Thucydides and Pindar: Historical Narrative and the World of Epinikian Poetry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hornblower, S. and Spawforth, A. (1996) *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edn), Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Loraux, N. (1986) *The Invention of Athens: the Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. A Sheridan, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Price, J.J. (2001) *Thucydides and Internal War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taxidou, O. (2004) *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Wills, G. (1992) *Lincoln at Gettysburg: the Words that Remade America*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Ziolkowski, J.E. (1981) *Thucydides and the Tradition of Funeral Speeches at Athens*, New York: Arno Press.

Further reading

Modern scholarship

- Greenwood, E. (2005) *Thucydides and the Shaping of History*, London: Duckworth.
- Oakley, J.H. (2004) *Picturing Death in Classical Athens*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fiction

- Mda, Z. (1995) *Ways of Dying*, Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
This novel is centred around the rituals of lament and mourning in township funerals in modern South Africa. Its affinities with laments in Greek literature are discussed in E. Steinmeyer (2003) 'Chanting the song of sorrow: threnody in Homer and Zakes Mda', *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, vol.15, no.2, pp.156–72.
- Pressfield, S. (2001) *Tides of War: an Epic Novel of Alcibiades and the Peloponnesian War*, London: Bantam Books. This novel covers some of the events discussed in this part of the block. Pressfield bases the narrative closely on ancient sources and you may enjoy spotting these.

Part 4 Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*

4.1 Introduction

Your last major topic of study in Block 2 will be Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, a play first performed at the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens in 411 BCE. You are already familiar with the Greek theatre and know something of its conventions from your study of Aeschylus' *Persians*. In this part of the block, you will be building on this knowledge of Greek drama to tackle a very different kind of play – a comedy or, more specifically, a play belonging to the genre of 'Old Comedy' (the name given to a form of comic theatre dating from the fifth century BCE).

As an Old Comic play, *Lysistrata* is full of humour and boasts a plot which, while based in the contemporary world, owes much to fantasy. But just because the play is not 'serious' in the way that tragedy is, this is not to say that it does not merit 'serious' study. Historically, the study of comedy has not always attracted the 'serious' attention afforded to non-comic theatre such as tragedy. This may well be due to the simple fact that because 'serious' can mean 'non-humorous', 'non-playful' and 'non-trivial', their opposites ('humorous', 'playful' and 'trivial') are often thought to amount to much the same thing. Or as one scholar has put it, "I was only joking", we say – but never, "I was only being serious" (Silk, 1988, p.18). So I think it is important to recognise that both humour and fantasy can in fact be vehicles for conveying meanings which are far from trivial, as I hope your study of the play will reveal. What is more, to write off Old Comedy as 'trivial' would be to overlook a particularly rich (if complex) source for the study of fifth-century BCE society – and, perhaps more importantly, to sideline an extraordinarily sophisticated and enjoyable literary genre.

Your study of the play will be structured as follows. You will first be asked to acquire some background knowledge about Aristophanes, Old Comedy and the historical context of the play, before reading the *Lysistrata* for the first time. You will then have a chance to collect your thoughts on some major topics thrown up by the play before reading it a second time, on this occasion looking at each scene in greater detail. Following a further reflective exercise, the culmination of your studies will be a consideration of how the play can be staged for a modern audience.

So that you continue to gain practice in looking at reference works when approaching new areas of study, you will soon be asked to follow a familiar procedure and use the *OCCC*. As you will be aware by now, the entries in the *OCCC* are densely written and you are naturally not expected to take in all the information presented; rather, you should aim to use them to help you gain an impression of the topics under discussion. It may be

worth articulating at this stage an added benefit of this work, namely that reading through an entry will also help you to become aware of the specific details it contains. Thus if you later find that you are lost for a given date or name, say, in the course of writing a TMA, your experience of working with the *OCCC* should mean that you are better placed to find the information you need. Naturally, one of the important decisions which will confront you when writing your TMAs, however, will be deciding which pieces of information are sufficiently relevant to an answer for you to include and which are better left out! (You can refer back to Section 2.3 of the Course Introduction for more advice on using the *OCCC* and other sources.)

For your work on the *Lysistrata* you will need Readings Book 1, where the play is included, *BHAG* and the *OCCC*. Towards the end of the part, you will also need to consult the course website. This part of the block should take around a week to complete, and is followed by the conclusion to the block, which you should work through before attempting TMA 03.

4.2 Aristophanes and Old Comedy

Exercise



First, then, look at the entry for 'Aristophanes' in the *OCCC*. (This entry was written by Sir Kenneth Dover, a prolific scholar who wrote not only on Aristophanes but on many other areas of Classical Greek literature and society.) Use the entry to answer the following questions:

- 1 Roughly how old was Aristophanes when the *Lysistrata* was produced?
- 2 How is the plot of the *Lysistrata* described?
- 3 What is the Greek name given to the entry of the Chorus?
- 4 What is the name given to the direct address by the Chorus to the audience?
- 5 What are Aristophanes' 'sympathetic characters' described as commonly wanting?
- 6 What comment does the author of the entry (Kenneth Dover) make about 411 BCE (the year of the *Lysistrata*'s production)?
- 7 What comment is made about ancient reaction to the heroine of the *Lysistrata*?

Discussion

Since the answers to these questions are all to be found in the *OCCC*, I shall not provide them again here. Let me point out, though, that you have come across the technical word *parodos* before in your study of *Persians*. You are less likely to have encountered the term *parabasis*, however, as the direct audience address is peculiar to comedy. In fact, the *Lysistrata* is exceptional among Aristophanes' fifth-century BCE plays in that it has no *parabasis*.

You may find it interesting to revisit this entry after you have read the *Lysistrata* to judge:

- (a) how well the description of the plot serves to sum up the play;
- (b) the extent to which you agree with the comment about the audience's potential reaction to *Lysistrata* herself;
- (c) the extent to which you think she is a typical 'sympathetic character'.

For the present, however, there are two important points I would like to make about this entry. The first is that it admits a degree of uncertainty about basic facts such as the date of Aristophanes' birth and the production dates of some of the plays, especially those which do not survive. (However, I am sure that you are used to dealing with an amount of uncertainty concerning dates where the study of the ancient world is concerned!) The second is that, in compiling this entry, Dover is often summarising tendencies and giving general (rather than hard-and-fast) rules. At other times, too, he is simply making educated guesses. Words such as 'commonly' ('his sympathetic characters *commonly* express ...') and 'possibly' ('*possibly* Aristophanes and his audience ...') indicate statements which deserve special scrutiny.

In fact, when using the *OCCC* in general, it is good to be aware of the presence of conjecture and summarising in the entries. It is not that the contributors are deliberately trying to mislead, but rather that – like all students of the ancient world – often their only option is to piece together a plausible account on the basis of the evidence available. As you perform the next exercise, look out for key words such as 'commonly', 'possibly', 'it is likely' and 'usually' with which the author of an entry indicates that he or she is making either a generalisation or an informed conjecture.

Exercise



Now read the entry under 'comedy (Greek), Old' in the *OCCC*. This entry is also densely written (especially at the beginning) and you will find that not all the details it includes have direct bearing on your study of the *Lysistrata*. Nevertheless, read through the entry quickly and look for answers to the following questions:

- 1 At which two festivals were comedies definitely performed in the fifth century BCE?
- 2 How many members were there in the comic chorus?
- 3 On what note do Old Comic plays typically end?
- 4 What is described as 'the most difficult question in the study of Old Comedy'?
- 5 What, according to the author (Kenneth Dover again), is the 'essential spirit of Old Comedy'?

Discussion

I hope you managed to find the answers to these questions in the entry. You may recall that you have already encountered the City Dionysia (also called Great Dionysia) and the Lenaea in your study of *Persians* – as well as the possibility, too, that plays were also reperformed elsewhere. One detail in which comedy does differ from tragedy, however, is in the number of members of the Chorus (for tragedy, this was twelve or fifteen strong). Again, you may find it interesting to revisit this entry once you have read the play in order to make your own evaluation of just how typical a play the *Lysistrata* is according to Dover's criteria.

You should now have a basic overview of Aristophanes' work and the genre in which he was writing. One point that will have emerged from the *OCCC* entries is that, despite their fantastic elements, Aristophanes' plays are very much based in the here and now, in the contemporary world of Athenian society (and in this sense stand in contrast to tragedy; as you will recall from your work on *Persians* in Part 1 of this block). To understand the play fully, it will therefore be crucial to consider the political and historical situation of the time of the play's production.

4.3 Political and historical background

One key strand you will be considering as you read the *Lysistrata* is the way in which the play relates to the society and culture of contemporary Athens. To be sure, there are important ways in which any work of literature can be revealing about the time and place in which it is written, but this is especially true for Classical Greek dramas, which were essentially written for a single performance. A playwright such as Aristophanes presumably had the opportunity to refine the details of his script right up to the last moment, and so the allusions to named individuals and current events we find in his plays were likely to have been as up-to-the-minute as those found nowadays in a satirical television or radio programme. For a cultural historian, then, Aristophanes' plays provide a remarkable opportunity to view a snapshot of contemporary life in Athens – an opportunity made all the more exciting by the fact that we know the production dates of nearly all of Aristophanes' plays. The *Lysistrata*, for example, was performed in 411 BCE and, while there is some uncertainty, there is good evidence to suggest that it was staged at the Lenaea festival in the month of Gamelion (January/February) rather than the Great Dionysia in Elaphabolion (March).

Exercise

In order to familiarise yourself with the political and historical developments of the time of the play's production, you should now read *BHAG*, pp.217–20: 'The War in the Aegean and the Oligarchic Coup at Athens (413–411 BC)' (see also Figure 8.1 on p.201). If you have time, you may also find it useful to read pp.213–17: 'The Invasion of Sicily (415–413 BC)' (with Figure 7.1 on p.167).



As you read, make notes on the following questions:

- 1 How did the war progress in the years immediately following the Sicilian Expedition?
- 2 What major event is mentioned as having taken place in 411 BCE?

Note that the narrative in *BHAG* may not allow you to answer these questions in the detail you would like. In my discussion below, I shall aim to flesh out those aspects which have a direct bearing on the *Lysistrata*. And remember, as you read *BHAG* you should take the opportunity to add to your timeline any dates which you think are important.



Discussion

I hope you managed to distil the basic details. Here is my own summary of the main points in which I have included some additional detail:

- 1 The Sicilian Expedition proved a huge setback for Athens. The loss of life and resources was considerable and Athens emerged in a much weakened position. Sparta saw its opportunity to capitalise on Athens' losses and actively resumed hostilities, hoping for an early, decisive victory. A number of Athens' allies were also encouraged by the Peloponnesians to revolt. In addition, the Spartan fortification at Decelea in northern Attica continued to confine the Athenians to their city walls, cutting them off from their agricultural land, their overland supply route and the silver mines at Laureum (thus depriving them of an important source of wealth: this was the 'spring of silver' mentioned in *Persians*, 238). These desperate times had in fact led the Athenians to use emergency reserves to build new ships, but as a consequence their finances were much reduced.

The abbreviated account of events in *BHAG* makes it difficult to reconstruct the precise state of affairs in 411 BCE, so let us consider this now. It would be fair to say that the odds were stacked against Athens, but not all the news was bad. The Athenians managed to score some minor naval victories and even to regain some previously lost territory. They had also established a strong naval base in the eastern Aegean at Samos (see Figure 8.1 on p.201 of *BHAG*). By 411 BCE, the Athenians' was the weaker position, but the war was once again in a position of stalemate. Perhaps if any one factor had the potential to prove decisive, it would be Persian intervention in the war. It is worth noting, I think, that a large chunk of the final book of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (8.5–44) is taken up with describing the renewed Persian interest and intervention in the war in 411 BCE: clearly the historian thought this to be a significant development.

BHAG also fails to fill in some of the finer details about the government of Athens between 413 and 411 BCE. The crisis following the Sicilian Expedition had led to a change in Athens' political system. There were now ten *probouloi* (plural of *proboulos*, translated as both 'commissioner' and 'magistrate' in the play). These were a group of older men forming a kind of executive

government able to take and swiftly implement emergency decisions.

- 2 The major event of 411 BCE, the year of the *Lysistrata*'s production, was the oligarchic coup: the vote made by the Athenian Assembly to establish the Council of Four Hundred. This vote took place some time after the *Lysistrata* was performed and it is interesting to contemplate just what – if anything – was known about the plans of Alcibiades at this time (see *BHAG*, p.218). The answer is probably 'not very much'. The play is set against a background of civil strife in the city, but there is little indication that the democracy itself is under threat. The one named individual who is attacked in the *Lysistrata* is Peisander and the reference to him at lines 490–92 of the play is key to our understanding of contemporary events. His name appears as *Lysistrata* herself talks about the funds stored on the Acropolis: she accuses him and other politicians of manufacturing crises for personal gain.

Peisander was one of the generals at Samos whom Alcibiades had enlisted to help persuade the Athenians to accept an oligarchic government in return for financial assistance from Persia (and note that Persia was still a force to be reckoned with, its power little diminished all these years after the Persian Wars). Most scholars surmise from the text of the *Lysistrata* that Peisander was (or had recently been) present in the city at the time the play was performed. Given, too, that Aristophanes singles him out for special mention, it seems a reasonable inference that Peisander's presence was found troubling by at least some in the city. It is less likely, though, that Aristophanes had wind of his radical plans or of Alcibiades' machinations with Tissaphernes (again, see *BHAG*, p.218). Had the planned coup been public knowledge, we could, I think, expect both mention of Alcibiades in the play and for his spokesman Peisander to have come in for greater and more specific criticism than he does. (If you would like to read Thucydides' account of the oligarchic coup of 411 BCE, it is dealt with at length in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 8.45–98.)

4.4 The *Lysistrata*

Reading the play

You are now asked to undertake your initial reading of the play. The text of the play appears in Reading 2.20 in a translation by A.H. Sommerstein. At



this stage, you should aim to read the text through fairly briskly in order to gain an overview of the play and an impression of the *Lysistrata* as a piece of drama. You may find it useful to envisage the play as performed in a Classical Greek theatre (Sommerstein's stage directions should prove useful in this respect). Although Sommerstein's is essentially a translation for the page rather than the stage, you may nevertheless like to read some of the scenes aloud so as to get a sense of the dialogue in performance.

As with *Persians*, there are notes on the play included in Readings Book 1. Please bear in mind that these are abridged from an edition of the play intended for professional classicists as well as students and that you are not expected to read them in detail. Rather, you should simply make use of these notes as and when you want to pursue a detail in greater depth.

Exercise

As you read, make notes in response to the following questions:

- What exactly does Lysistrata's plan for achieving peace involve?
- Can you think of any factors which, in real life, might have prevented the plan from succeeding?

Once you have read the play, take a moment to collect your thoughts in response to these questions by referring to any notes you have made and by rereading any passages you may have marked as being of relevance. Then refer to the following discussion.

Discussion

The *Lysistrata* is famous for being the play about the sex strike but, as you have no doubt noted, abstention from sex is just one way in which the women manage to bring an end to the war, the other important strand of Lysistrata's plan being the seizure of the Acropolis.

In the play's fast-moving prologue, we only hear of the plan to take the Acropolis very briefly at 175–79, just before the women swear their oath. A cry offstage at 240 then signals that the Acropolis has fallen to the women (240–42). The taking of the Acropolis is in fact a key part of the plan, since with it the women gain control of not only the state's funds but also Athens' religious centre and symbolic seat of power. Within twenty lines of their appearance the men's Chorus remind us of the Acropolis' strategic importance by recalling its occupation by the Spartan king Cleomenes in 508 BCE, whose

peaceful ejection was soon followed by the establishment of democracy in Athens. There is also constant reference to the Acropolis in terms of its religious importance and the men even suggest that Athena herself is under threat from the women:

Forward, hurry, to the Acropolis
on to the aid of our Goddess!
(302–303)

The men's Chorus, then, come to reclaim the Acropolis because of its political and religious significance, but perhaps a more acute crisis for the city's leaders is the fact that the Athenians' financial reserves are based there (kept either in the Parthenon or in the temple of Athena Polias). When the Commissioner (*proboulos* or magistrate) arrives at the Acropolis it is in search of funds to support the war effort, without which the future of Athens' military operations could be in peril (421–24). The Acropolis reserves are also said to play a key role in prolonging the war on quite different grounds. When speaking to the Commissioner, Lysistrata claims (in the passage about Peisander cited earlier) that the money stored there provides an incentive for corrupt politicians to cause trouble (490–92).

An interesting point to note about Lysistrata's plan is how it changes throughout the play. In the prologue, the division of labour seems clear enough: the younger women are to sit at home tempting their husbands, whereas the older women (represented by the women's Chorus) are to seize and guard the Acropolis. However, in a single stroke, the whole situation changes, as Lysistrata says:

And for ourselves, let's go inside and join the other women on
the Acropolis in barring the doors.
(245–46)

With this sentence, Aristophanes has his heroine do two things. First, Lysistrata indicates that the stage building is to be understood as representing the Acropolis (and there is no reason beforehand to suppose that this is where the action was taking place). Secondly, she instructs the women to follow her in – and this is where they stay, on the Acropolis, contrary to previous arrangements.

Another unexpected element of the plan is mentioned just before this, at lines 242–44, when Lysistrata addresses her Spartan counterpart: 'So now, Lampito, you go and arrange everything at your end, but leave these others here with us as hostages.' Who are 'these others' Lysistrata mentions? Presumably, they are the women from the other

Greek states, such as the Theban and the Corinthian addressed earlier in the prologue. Of course, it makes no sense at all in realist terms that these women should be taken hostage – who would know where they were or why they were being held? Who is to organise the sex strike in their native towns if not them?

When we analyse the plan, then, it appears confused and flawed – an allegation that could also be made in more general terms about the plot of the play. For instance, the women complain that their husbands are away from home, in which case the men must be used to not having sexual relations with their wives. Yet these long-absent men conveniently turn up in Athens the moment the sex strike is called and Lysistrata's plan thus has an almost instantaneous effect (the only indication of time having passed comes at 881, where Cinesias claims that his and Myrrhine's baby has gone six days without food). You may have found it odd, too, that sex within marriage appears to be the only way for the men to find satisfaction in the play. After all, in the real world of late fifth-century BCE Athens plenty of other options would no doubt have been open to them, such as prostitutes, slaves and members of their own sex – not to mention masturbation.

What is interesting is that as audience members or readers of this play we do not, I think, generally dwell on the flaws in Lysistrata's plan. Why should this be? First, there is the point made briefly earlier, namely that the finer details of the plan are all outlined rather quickly. Since they are not made the focus of the audience's attention, and since other elements of the play command our attention to a far greater extent, we have little opportunity to subject the plan to scrutiny or to notice the changes Lysistrata makes to it. This is especially true in the thick of a performance, where the audience does not have the facility open to a reader of pausing or rereading a line. A second important point is that there is something about comedy which invites its audience to overlook logical inconsistencies. Take the example of a genre closely related to comedy: the joke. If we were to examine the assumptions behind a joke in any detail, we would often find that it simply made no sense. The minute we stop to ask, 'In what circumstances would a chicken ever cross a road?', we have already ruined the joke for ourselves. Similarly, if we become vexed that the humorous and fantastic elements of the *Lysistrata*'s plot make no sense – that is, if we fail to enter the world of the play with its comic logic – then we deny ourselves much of the enjoyment on offer. For the original audience a key part of this enjoyment would no doubt have been the peace achieved by the end of the play and the accompanying

celebrations. This peace is achieved in an unrealistic way, but is no less seductive a fantasy for that.

Sociology and female characters

Before you go on to look at the play scene by scene, I would like you to consider two questions connected with the play's characters and the insight these provide into contemporary society. Thinking about these topics now will allow you to reflect on your understanding of the play and to focus your reading when you come to look at it a second time. For each set of questions you should make brief notes, referring to the text of the play if necessary, before reading the discussion.

Exercise

Think back to Essay Four, 'Self and society in Classical Athens' (which you read at the end of Part 2, on the Acropolis) and make notes on the following questions, referring to the text of the play and rereading any passages which you think are of particular relevance.



- What are the different social groupings (e.g. gender, age, nationality) that we find in the play?
- Do any of these groups display a natural allegiance to any others?

Discussion

No doubt you will have thought of a number of different types of character in the play. After all, there is a wealth of distinct groups in the *Lysistrata*, many of which are in direct conflict with one another for the bulk of the play. Most prominently, of course, we find men in conflict with women – and these two groups further subdivide into the old men and women of the choruses and the other, younger male and female characters of the play. The old women of the Chorus are united in a cause with the younger women, and the older men fight on behalf of all the city's males – thus the battle lines within Athens are drawn up purely on the basis of gender. The fighting between the two choruses forms what Sommerstein calls 'a counterpoint to the main melody of the action' (1990, p.5), and their behaviour often prefigures that of the younger characters. The *parodos* (the entry of the choruses following the prologue), for example, is the first glimpse we get of men

and women in direct conflict, and towards the end of the play it is the choruses who are the first to reconcile their differences.

The older choruses are characterised quite distinctly from the younger characters, however. Arguably, both the men and the women are more physically pugnacious than their younger counterparts and both are prone to reflect on past glories. Both groups claim to have served the city well in their various ways: the old men as fighters at battles such as Marathon (285), the old women as active participants in the city's religious institutions and festivals (638–47). The two groups could, then, be said to have crucial qualities in common – first, an instinct to fight, and second, a common history and purpose – which makes their early reconciliation all the more credible.

The other major conflict in the play is between the Athenians and the Spartans. One of our tasks later will be to look at the way in which the Spartans are presented in the play, but for now let us note two points. First, the Spartans are given a surprisingly positive press and there is not inconsiderable attention paid to what the two sides share in common in terms, for example, of history and religion (this is something to look out for when you come to read the play for a second time). Secondly, we should note that, by focusing on the conflict between Athens and Sparta, Aristophanes neatly sidelines the involvement of a huge number of other states in the war. We should add that this focus makes sense historically, dramatically *and* thematically: historically because Athens and Sparta were indeed the main players; dramatically because it is neater to have two rather than many sides in conflict; and thematically by fitting in with the considerable use the play makes of pairs of binary opposites (men/women, war/peace, friend/foe) and their reconciliation. However, the fact that Aristophanes sees fit to have women from other Greek states come to *Lysistrata*'s initial gathering (and chooses to do this, as we have seen, even when it means disposing of them in a logically unsatisfying fashion) is nevertheless significant. The war affects all of Greece and the making of peace in this play requires an act of Panhellenic unity.

I spoke just now of the prevalence in the play of pairs of binary opposites which are then reconciled. Not all groupings fall neatly into this pattern, however. Perhaps the most noteworthy exceptions are slaves, a number of whom appear in the play (e.g. the slave girl mentioned in the prologue at 184–85 and Cinesias' male childminder Manes at 908). It is interesting that, in contrast with other plays of Aristophanes, slaves play only minor roles in the *Lysistrata* and there is

no hint of them enjoying the material benefits of peace at the end of the play – on the contrary, some Spartan slaves are actually threatened with being burned alive at 1217–18. Thus a further significant pair of binary opposites comes into effect – those who benefit from the peace (citizens and their wives) and those who do not, namely slaves. Note, too, how this division sidelines groups in the city such as metics (resident foreigners).

There are several further intriguing groupings in the play. In the prologue, some of the different *demes* of Athens from which the women come are singled out for mention for humorous purposes: for example, Acharnae, ‘Lousia’ (Anagyrus in the Greek text) and the island of Salamis. There is surely a hint here that residents of certain areas were the subject of stock jokes in Athens. A more intriguing set of groupings is outlined by Lysistrata in her speech to the Commissioner (*proboulos* or magistrate) at 580–82. Here she makes the seemingly serious suggestion that groups such as metics, friends of Athens living in allied states and disenfranchised debtors should be made part of the citizen body. These suggestions are somewhat radical, but what are we to make of them? We shall consider this question during your second reading of the play.

Exercise

Lastly in this section, I would like you to think about the way in which the play’s most prominent social group – women – are characterised in the *Lysistrata*. So that you can consider this issue in an informed way, you should first read *BHAG*, pp.157–61, ‘Oikos and Polis’. Then read the entry for ‘women’ in the *OCCC*.



- To what extent do the women in the play resemble ‘real’ women of the time?

Once more, you should take a few minutes to make notes and refer back to *BHAG*, to the *OCCC* and to the text of the play, rereading any passages which you think are of particular relevance.

Discussion

To a large extent, I think, the women in the play are presented very much in line with what we might expect. We gain numerous revealing glimpses of domestic detail in the play that closely chime with what we know of women’s lives – from caring for children and collecting water to woolworking and weaving (see Figure 2.25).

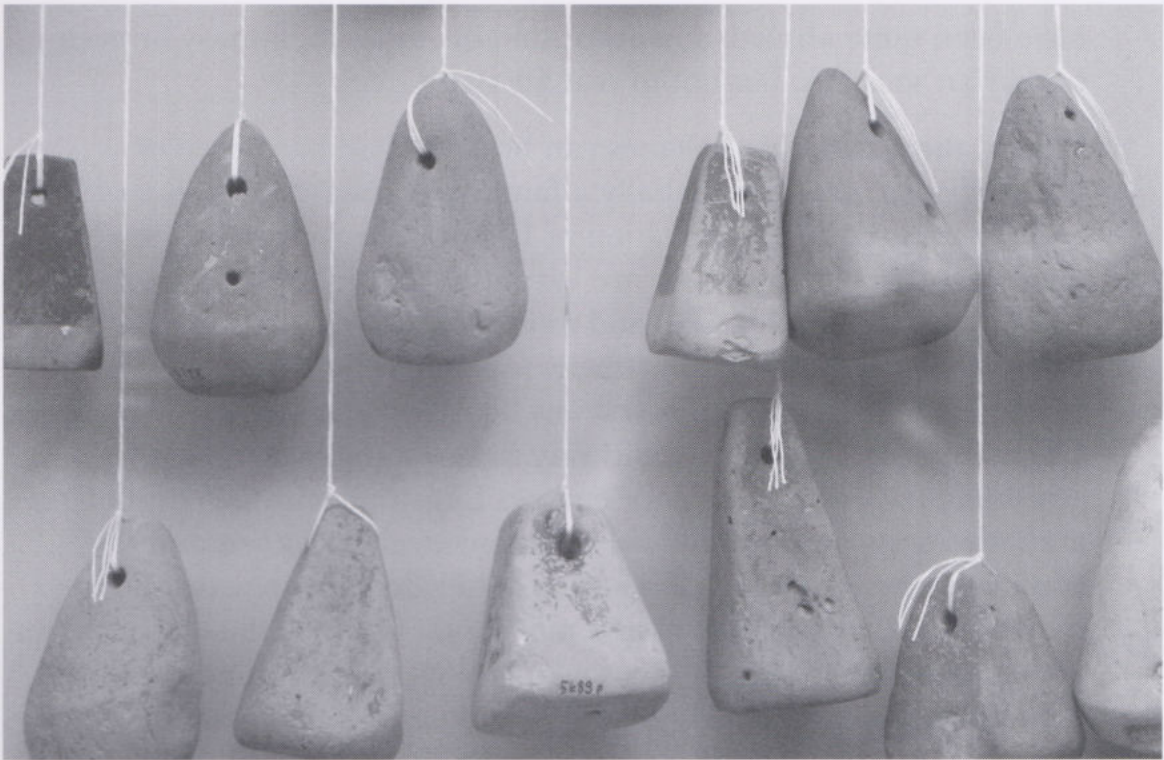


Figure 2.25 Loom weights. © The Open University. Photo: James Robson.

The way in which concepts taken from the female domestic sphere are brought to bear on the broader world of the *polis* is particularly striking. Notable examples of this include *Lysistrata*'s suggestion that women's expertise in the management of household finances can be successfully applied to the city as a whole (493–95) and the women's dressing up of the *proboulos* (magistrate) as a corpse, reflecting women's extensive role in burial (599–614). The most remarkable instance, though, is surely *Lysistrata*'s solution to the city's problems, which she presents in terms of a metaphor of woolworking (568–87).

In case we are seduced into believing that the women in the play are true to life, though, we have to remember that we are dealing with a highly unrealistic scenario. For all the convincing details, the premise underpinning the plot of the *Lysistrata* is essentially fantastic. A scenario in which women gather together in secret, where they plot and fight against men and take charge of the city's affairs (albeit temporarily), was unthinkable in the real world of fifth-century BCE Athens. Indeed, Aristophanes is constantly playing with the topsy-turvy idea of women in power to great effect and much of the appeal of the woolworking metaphor, for instance, comes from the way in which he takes this domestic image from the woman's realm and cleverly applies it to the public male domain. In so doing, Aristophanes almost makes the concept of female rule seem logical, whereas to his audience the idea of women running the city would

have been quite absurd: a concept suitable to myth, fantasy or even barbarian societies, but not to real life in a Greek *polis*.

I think, then, that Aristophanes can be said to add a degree of plausibility to what is essentially a fantasy, by interweaving the realistic and the absurd. His presentation of *Lysistrata* as a priestess figure is a good example of this – there are various indications in the play that *Lysistrata* is cast in this role, and most significantly the current priestess of Athena Polias in Athens was called *Lysimache*, or ‘loosener of battles’ (whereas *Lysistrata* means ‘loosener of armies’).

Characterising *Lysistrata* in this way has two advantages for Aristophanes. First, he at once endows *Lysistrata* with the kind of authority a woman would need to organise other women and to command the respect of men – thus her leadership appears all the more natural. Secondly, it allows him subtly to evoke the one occasion on which women could collect together outside their homes without men being present, namely religious ceremonies, thus making the women collecting together seem less unusual. Allusions to women’s role in religious rituals are to be found throughout the play, beginning with the mention of the religious festivals found in its first lines (1–4).

When we start to think of the various ways in which the women in the *Lysistrata* may not be typical of their time, further facts about the play strike us. First, this is a comedy and thus we would not necessarily expect the realistic portrayal of character and character traits always to be the playwright’s primary aim. In fact, it is evident that Aristophanes is at times relying heavily on stereotypes of female behaviour. In Old Comedy, women were typically represented as sex-mad and lovers of wine. Indeed, much of the humour of the sex strike relies on their reputation as the former (particularly exploited in the scene where various women try to leave the Acropolis at 727–66) and women’s supposed fondness for drink underpins many of the jokes in the oath-swearing scene (particularly 194–208). Seen in this light, even *Lysistrata*’s woolworking metaphor can be seen as a stereotypically frivolous female idea.

Also relevant to the discussion is the added complication that in the original production all the female characters would have been played by men. We know relatively little of the costumes and less still about the acting styles that the actors would have employed in their portrayal of women, but the level of naturalism on the one hand and pantomime on the other is surely important to the way that female characters would have been perceived by the (largely male) audience.

An interesting perspective on the question of the presentation of women is to consider how valuable Aristophanes' play is as a source for the study of fifth-century BCE women's lives (and I should add that this is a 'live' question over which different scholars would take different views). I think *my* response would be that the *Lysistrata* is very valuable indeed, but that we must always be aware of its status as a piece of comic theatre. Thus we have to scrutinise each 'fact' presented about women carefully, and must be wary not to be seduced into unthinkingly trusting the idea that all women want an end to the war, say, or are eager for the return of their husbands.



There are a number of areas that I have not tackled in this discussion, most notably the different ways in which the older and younger women are characterised and how these differences might reflect the reality of life for the two age groups. You might like to consider this further as you read the play a second time. If the portrayal of the Spartan woman, Lampito, interests you, you may like to look at BHAG, pp.97–99 on 'Becoming a Spartan Woman' and 'Sex and Marriage'.

The *Lysistrata* section by section

In your initial work on the *Lysistrata*, you were invited to read through the play briskly to gain an impression of it as a piece of drama and to allow you to consider some key issues. In this part of the block, you are asked to undertake a second reading of the play, this time section by section. In each exercise here you are told which section of the play you should turn to, and what questions you should consider while reading the relevant scenes. You should look at each question in advance and, as you read, make notes and mark any passages you consider important. Then, when you have finished the section, take a few moments to put your thoughts into order before reading the subsequent discussion.

As you work on the play, remember to make use of the notes on the play in Reading 2.20. These provide detailed comments on the text and so should help explain any references in the play about which you are unsure. Please bear in mind that you are not expected to read all the notes in detail: rather you should regard them as a resource to draw on if you wish to do so.

Exercise

1–253 The Prologue



- How does Aristophanes build suspense before Lysistrata's revelation of the strike plan?

Discussion

There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer to this question, so don't worry if your answer is different in kind from mine. Remember, though, as always, that it's important that you can give reasons for your answer.

As you will have seen, the announcement of the sex strike plan comes at 119–24:

LYSISTRATA I will say: there's no need for the idea to stay hidden.

What we must do, women, if we mean to compel the men to live in peace is to abstain –

CALONICE From what? Tell us.

LYSISTRATA You'll do it, then?

CALONICE We'll do it even if we have to give our lives. [*The others indicate enthusiastic agreement.*]

LYSISTRATA Well, then: we must abstain from – cock and balls.

(*Lysistrata* 119–24)

I think that right from the beginning of the *Lysistrata*, the audience is led to expect that an interesting scenario is about to unfold. We discover in the very first lines that Lysistrata has arranged to gather the women together – an intriguing prospect in itself for the (predominantly) male audience for whom Lysistrata may well have been the very first talking housewife they had seen in a comic play (previously, female characters in comedy tended to be either goddesses or whores – and generally silent). What is more, the importance of the plan is soon emphasised. At 15, we learn that it is a 'far from trivial matter' she wishes to discuss; later we learn that it is 'big' (22), 'meaty' (23) and that 'the salvation of Greece' (30) depends on her plan. The initial non-arrival of the women is a clever technique used by Aristophanes to stress all this. It allows him first to show how important the plan is to Lysistrata by having her grow annoyed, and then how significant its announcement is to the other women by having them turn up from far and wide despite the difficulties they are

said to face leaving the home (15–19). Later in the scene the women are also invited to say how much the plan's success would mean to them, thus raising the stakes high (99–118).

The nature of such an important plan is intriguing enough, but I think the fact that its revelation is put off until all the women are present must also stir the audience's interest (e.g. *Lysistrata* holds back at 74–5). And our curiosity is roused all the more by the small indications we get of what the plan will involve. We are told, for example, that it is women who will be involved (30) and that their sexy gowns, see-through shifts and slippers will be utilised (46–8). In addition, various women's physical attributes are emphasised in the dialogue – such as Lampito's breasts (83) and the Corinthian woman's depilated genitalia (86–92) – adding an air of risqué sexuality to the proceedings, which no doubt creates its own expectations.

In the light of this discussion, it is interesting to refer back to the text above and to see how some of the features we have noted are present in this final, brief exchange (119–24): that is, the importance of the plan is once more emphasised and its revelation put off one last time. It is also interesting to note that 'cock and balls' represents a single word in the Greek, *peos*, an obscenity referring to male genitalia, but with a somewhat stronger force than 'cock' or 'dick' in English. Despite all the sexual innuendoes (21–5; 59–60), the titillating details we have had about the women's dress (43–8) and bodies (83; 86–92), and even the mention of dildos or *olisboi* (109–10; see Figure 2.26), this is the first obscene word we hear in the play – perhaps the first an Athenian theatre audience had ever heard uttered by a female character. This gives *Lysistrata*'s announcement even more punch. Note, too, how line 127 ('Why pales your colour, why this flow of tears?'), cast as it is in high-flown tragic-style language, serves to throw the obscenity into even starker relief.

Exercise

254–386 The *parodos*: the entry of the Chorus and first choral songs

- How do the men's logs and fire and the women's pitchers and water contribute to the characterisation of the choruses?

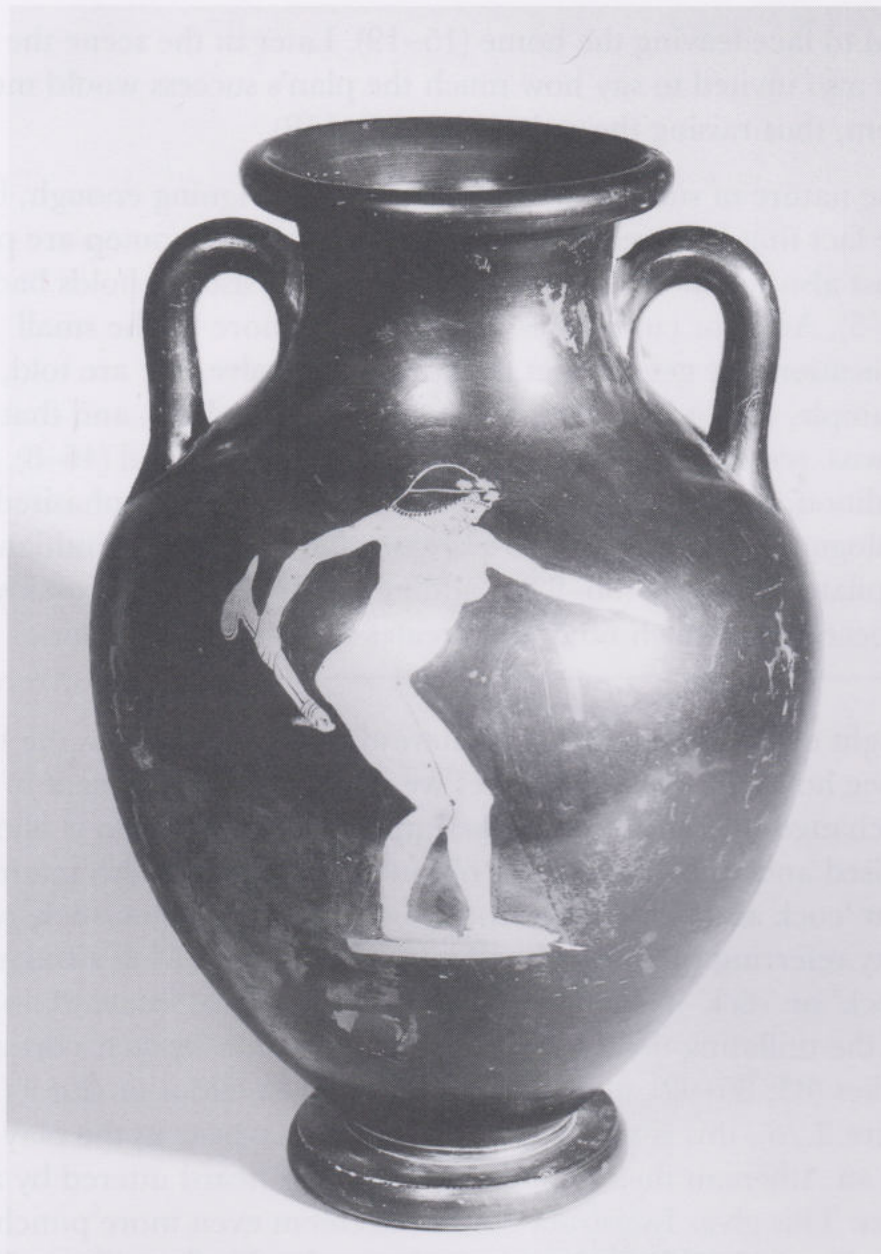


Figure 2.26 Red-figure amphora 'La marchande de phallus' or 'The dildo vendor' (side B), Greek, 480–460 BCE. © Photothèque des Musées de la Ville de Paris/Photo: Pierrain.

Discussion

Naturally, there are different ways of approaching this question. You may well have come up with different (and equally relevant) points than these here, but here is my response.

The men's plan to 'consign to the flames all the women who have instigated and pursued this plan' (269–70) neatly provides Aristophanes with a pretext to have them march on the Acropolis as a group, and thus the arrival of the first half-Chorus is achieved in a dramatically convincing way. Equally dramatically plausible is the

arrival of the women's Chorus who come with water to thwart the men's plans. The splitting of the Chorus into two groups of twelve is unusual in Old Comedy, but seems anything but forced. We might remark, too, that the men's carrying of wood and the women's carrying of pitchers reflect typical domestic duties of the two sexes for lower-class Athenians and are thus visual indicators for an audience of the choruses' gender and status.

Fire and water are strong symbols exploited by Aristophanes to full effect in this scene. For example, the older men's fire mirrors the fiery passion of the younger men later in the play, which the older women with their water are easily able to quench when they choose, just as the younger women would be able, when *they* choose, to quench their husbands' passion. We might, too, see sexual symbolism in the phallic logs carried by the men, which contrast with the women's pitchers. Further sexual imagery has been read into the men's attempts to use the logs as a battering ram against the closed gate of the Acropolis (the Propylaea) at 308–309. (The Propylaea is shown in Colour Plate 5 of the Illustrations Book and on the cover of this block, and is also discussed in Part 2 of this block.)

The way in which the two groups handle their chosen weapons also adds to their characterisation. The old men find carrying the wood difficult and when lighting the fire they temporarily blind themselves with the smoke (295). The old women on the other hand encounter no such difficulties with their pitchers which they nimbly manoeuvre to drench the men with water (381–84). Put simply, the women outwit the men with their superior speed and organisation.

The destructive nature of fire might also usefully be contrasted with the life-enhancing properties of water. This is even picked up in the exchange between the two groups where fire is linked to the funeral pyre at 373 and water to the wedding bath at 378, with water's use in propagating the growth of plants also mentioned (384). We might also note that Athena is appealed to at 348 as 'Lady of the Lake' and is thus subtly claimed by the women as a co-fighter. It is interesting, too, that when the Commissioner (or magistrate) arrives at the Acropolis, he says he has come for money to pay for timber for ships (421–23) – thus further extending the men's association with wood. Perhaps we are even entitled to recall the importance of the combination of wood and water to Athens: that is, the domination of the sea enjoyed by the city thanks to its 'wooden walls', that is, its fleet.

Exercise

387–705 The *proboulos* episode and the choral debate

- 1 What is the nature of the political advice given by Lysistrata at 568–87?
- 2 In what ways does Lysistrata claim that women are affected by the war at 589–97?

Discussion

- 1 I expect you agree that these lines, in which Lysistrata likens solving the city's problems to untangling a skein of wool, comprise an extraordinary metaphor. First, her metaphor leads her to suggest sending embassies 'now this way and now that' (569–70), presumably to sue for peace. She then suggests that 'villains' and 'those people who combine and mat themselves together to gain office' should be removed from the citizen body: here the target seems to be public figures who belong to political factions and who conspire to gain money and power. From 579 onwards she mentions groups who, she says, should be included in the citizenry but are currently excluded. Four groups are mentioned:
 - (a) metics;
 - (b) foreigners who are well-disposed to Athens;
 - (c) debtors (who were disenfranchised at Athens, hence the need for the reinstatement of their citizen rights);
 - (d) Athens' colonies.

These suggestions are certainly striking: the sending of embassies aside, could any of them have been taken seriously in contemporary Athens? Perhaps in the recent years of crisis following the failure of the Sicilian Expedition Athenians had grown used to suggestions for wide-reaching reform – and we must remember the radical nature of the oligarchic coup which actually occurred just a few months after the *Lysistrata* was staged. The situation becomes more complicated, though, when we try to clarify exactly what Lysistrata is proposing. What 'foreigners' does she mean? What does she mean by 'colonies'? (Scholars are unsure.) And how would the various members of Aristophanes' audience have reacted to these suggestions – made ostensibly in earnest, but presented in the form of an involved metaphor by a

female character in the midst of a bawdy comedy? There are no easy answers here.

- 2 These lines serve as a useful reminder of just how 'serious' Aristophanic comedy can be: 'serious', that is, in two senses of the word, weighty *and* non-humorous/non-playful. *Lysistrata* makes it clear how women suffer in war: mothers' sons are killed and young women pass their prime without finding a husband. This was a particularly serious fate in a society where marriage and child-bearing were viewed as a woman's natural goals in life and where war required the replacement of dead males (compare these sentiments with those which Thucydides has Pericles voice in the *Epitaphios Logos* in Part 3 of this block). The *proboulos*, too, recognises the pain brought by the death of young men and his retort to her second point, that 'men grow old too' (594), is dealt with convincingly by *Lysistrata*, who argues that women's suffering is greater.

Exercise

706–828 The strike plot and choral debate

- What symbols of Athena do we find in this scene?

Discussion



I found that we are constantly reminded that the setting of this scene is the Acropolis, Athena's sacred precinct, and noticed various paraphernalia connected with the goddess cropping up in this scene. First, we find the 'sacred helmet' at 751: probably envisaged as the helmet belonging to the bronze Athena Promachos statue sculpted by Pheidias (see Plate 10). A few lines later (759) we find a reference to the 'guardian serpent', a creature said to inhabit the Acropolis, but about whose existence the historian Herodotus is perhaps sceptical (Herodotus 8.41.2–3). You have already seen a sculpted version of this serpent curled up under the shield of the statue of Athena Parthenos (see Plates 11–12 in the Illustrations Book). At the time of the Persian invasion in 480 BCE, when the honey-cake traditionally offered to the serpent remained unconsumed, the Athenians took this as a sign that Athena had fled the city and that, consequently, they should evacuate the city themselves. The third symbol we find are the owls at 760, an animal sacred to Athena in her role as guardian of the city (Athena Polias).

Exercise

829–1013 Cinesias and Myrrhine

- What are the different sources of humour we find in lines 870–953 (Myrrhine's teasing of Cinesias)?

Discussion

Discussing and categorising humour is never straightforward but I hope that you were nevertheless able to make some comments about this scene that you found meaningful. For me, much of the humour stems from Cinesias' growing frustration and the tantalising way in which Myrrhine treats him. Cinesias' plan is as desperate as it is transparent: he plans to tempt Myrrhine out of the Acropolis by bringing their baby and then to persuade her to come home to look after it, to tend to her work – and, of course, to make love. However, his lack of care for the baby is soon exposed, at 908: when Myrrhine suggests it is an impediment to their love-making he tells his slave to take the baby home straight away. Myrrhine's running back and forth for various objects is a long comic sequence strung out to rouse Cinesias' desire all the more, and he nowhere makes his desperation more clear than at 934 when he shouts, 'I want a fuck!' or at 949 when Myrrhine offers him a cylindrical perfume bottle and he points to his erect phallus saying, 'I've already got one!'

Important to this scene, then, is its visual humour. As you will recall from your study of *Persians*, there are no stage directions in the Greek text (those in the English text are reconstructed by the translator), but we can tell from the characters' words that as part of his costume Cinesias has an erect penis and that Myrrhine brings the mentioned items out of the gates. What we are less well placed to know is what the various stage properties looked like in the original production. Did these add to the humour of the scene? Was the perfume bottle particularly phallic, for example – and if so, was it big enough for all or only some of the audience to see? We can also imagine other parts of this scene effectively played for laughs: perhaps the baby could be disposed of in a comic way, or perhaps the clutter of the bed, mattress, pillow and blanket could be exploited to comic effect. We should also remember that in the hands of a good producer or actor lines which look far from funny on the page can be made to elicit considerable laughter from an audience.

Exercise

1014–1215 Reconciliation

- 1 Who makes the first move in the process of reconciliation between the two choruses?
- 2 How might the figure of Reconciliation have been represented in the original performance?

Discussion

- 1 It is the women who make all the moves towards reconciliation in this scene. The women's leader offers to be a 'firm friend' to the men's leader at 1017, despite the men's continuing hostility, and she then shows her care by clothing him and taking out the gnat that is in his eye. Note how this action symbolically restores the men's sight: now that they can see clearly, the men are content to make peace!
- 2 The figure of Reconciliation belongs to a group of what Bella Zweig (1992) has called 'mute nude female characters' in Aristophanes. These are often minor goddesses and/or abstract concepts made human (other examples include Showtime and Holiday). There is considerable scholarly debate as to how these figures may have been represented on stage. In his commentary on the play, Sommerstein states the view that Reconciliation would have been played by a male actor wearing appropriate padding. Other scholars, though, have suggested that these figures would have been played by real women: that is to say, slave girls. Our sources are silent on the issue but perhaps the more plausible scenario is that of the padded male actor for the simple reason that the figure would have had to be visible for the whole theatre audience. Arguments can be made on both sides, however. Which view do *you* favour and why?

Exercise1216–1321 Drunken festivities and *exodos* (exit of Chorus)

- What does the presence of this scene add to the play?

Discussion

As you might recall from the description of Old Comedy in the *OCCC*, the ending of Aristophanes' plays is typically 'festive in character ... a kind of formal recognition of the hero's triumph'. The final scene of the *Lysistrata* is no exception, as you can see, and so here we find the song, dance and celebrations we might expect.

Nevertheless, I found this scene striking for two reasons. First, we have the positive comments that the Athenians make about the Spartans: whereas the Athenians are certainly hostile to their slaves, the Spartans receive nothing but kind words from them. Furthermore, it is Spartan music and song that accompany much of the festivities in this final scene. The Athenians are literally dancing to a Spartan tune and the lyrics of the songs concern the two cities' successes in the Persian Wars on the one hand (1249–72) and the glory of Sparta on the other (1296–1315). Note that the play would originally have ended with a traditional hymn to Athena (this was not preserved by copyists of the manuscript as it was not composed by Aristophanes). We shall consider the portrayal of Sparta in the play in greater detail in the next subsection.

The second remarkable feature is the pairing up of the men and women into married couples during *Lysistrata*'s song of 1279–90, signalled at 1275–76. Often at the end of Aristophanes' plays, we find the play's protagonist, an old or middle-aged man, able to satisfy his revitalised libido with the assistance of young women, such as slave girls. Here, though, we find a scenario logically consistent with one of the initial premises of the strike plot – that men and women can find sexual satisfaction only with their spouses. In one respect, then, the celebrations are marking a return to domestic life – a return to a peace-time 'normality' which is a far cry from a world where the women have power over men. Since the husbands are now home from war, the men are presumably to be thought of as taking charge of their homes, families *and their wives* once more. (Compare this with Odysseus' homecoming – *nostos* – which provides Homer's *Odyssey* with its happy ending: this story pattern is not new to Aristophanes!)

Of the questions you have considered on the *Lysistrata* this is among the most open-ended. No doubt you have come to your own views on the value of this scene to the play (or, indeed, lack of value). You may find it useful to take a moment to compare your reaction to mine. What points that you had come up with did I fail to make and vice versa? Now you have the benefit of both your thoughts and mine on

this topic, how would you structure a response to this question if you had to answer it for a TMA or in an examination?

Sparta and the *Lysistrata*'s humour

In this subsection, you are going to have the opportunity to draw together various strands from your study of the *Lysistrata* and to consider important questions central to our understanding of Aristophanes' work. In considering two challenging topics – the presentation of Sparta in Aristophanes' play and the role of humour – you will be bringing your detailed knowledge of the play to bear on broad and complex themes. This kind of work will be useful preparation for your TMAs where the assembling and analysis of evidence is also required.



The first question concerns the portrayal of Spartans in the play, a topic which you have already had a chance to consider briefly in the context of your earlier work both on the social groupings found in the *Lysistrata* and on the play's final scene. Before answering the question below, you will find it useful to do two things. First, take a few moments to consider briefly what you know about Athens' relationship with Sparta from your work on this block as a whole. Secondly, look at the relevant sections of the chapter on Sparta in *BHAG*. I suggest that you just read the sections on 'The Dark Age and the Archaic Period' (pp.91–95) and 'The Spartan System' (pp.95–100). And if the topic of Sparta interests you, either now or later you may also like to read pp.100–109 of *BHAG* and the entry on 'Sparta' in the *OCCC*.

Exercise

Having completed your reading, now consider the following question:

- To what extent are the Spartans portrayed in a positive light in the play?

Remember that the implication of any 'To what extent ...' question is that there are points to be made both for and against. By referring to the text and using any notes you might have made while you read the play, take time not only to assemble arguments in favour of and against the proposition, but also to locate passages which you feel fail to point clearly in either direction.

Discussion

As I mentioned earlier, the Spartans are given something of a positive press in this play and so you may have found it difficult to assemble a long list of points ‘against’. In a pause in the celebrations that end the play, an Athenian even remarks that ‘the Spartans really were so charming!’ (1226) and we might also note that in a play which celebrates peace it is the Spartans who are the more eager to end the war. It is the Spartans, too, who send an embassy to Athens, rather than the other way round (980ff. and 1073ff.) – hardly a reflection of real life in 411 BCE when it was the Spartans who had the upper hand in the fighting. Note, too, that throughout the play Aristophanes’ portrayal of Athens and the Athenians is hardly complimentary!

So are the Spartans simply charming peacemakers? This is not quite the case. At 629–30, the men’s Chorus claims that ‘men of Laconia ... can be no more trusted than a ravening wolf’, a comment which reflects the reputation Spartans had in antiquity for being deceitful. This quality is mentioned again at 1269–70, where the Spartan sings ‘may we be rid of all wily foxes’, that is, may we cease being deceitful. What is more, the Spartans are the first to admit to Lysistrata that they are in the wrong in connection with the war (1147). Even these points can be made to seem positive, though. Perhaps the men’s Chorus are to be seen as unsympathetic and as voicing an unreasonable prejudice, looking for reasons to prolong the war. Perhaps the Spartan’s open admission of wiliness can be taken as actually signalling the opposite, namely honesty. Perhaps the Spartans’ admission of wrongdoing can be taken as a willingness to compromise – a conciliatory tactic to make it easier for the Athenians to make peace.

A particularly fruitful angle on the question of Aristophanes’ depiction of Sparta comes from an analysis of the way in which historical events are presented in the play. Lysistrata’s memory is long and one of the events she mentions is the expulsion of the tyrant Hippias from Athens in 510 BCE. The account she gives of the end of the tyranny at Athens (1150–56) is nothing short of extraordinary. After all, few Athenians would have thought to mention the role of Sparta’s King Cleomenes in these events – rather, popular wisdom was that the tyranny was all but ended when Hippias’ brother Hipparchus was slain by two Athenian lovers, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, in 514 BCE. (Thucydides’ comment on this episode of Athenian history is revealing here: see Reading 2.21 and – as evidence of the way these events were recalled in popular song – Reading 2.22). Another curious description given by Lysistrata is of the mission led by the Athenian Cimon, sent



to help the Spartans after the earthquake and subsequent helot revolt of 464 BCE (see *BHAG*, pp.142–43). The version of events at 1138–45 describes a desperate Sparta saved from near disaster by Athens' timely help. In actual fact, Cimon's help was ignominiously rejected by Sparta (possibly because the democratic sensibilities of the Athenian troops led them to sympathise with the oppressed helots) and the whole debacle led to his enforced exile from Athens (see Thucydides' account of the episode in Reading 2.23 and the *ostrakon* in Colour Plate 10 of the Illustrations Book). There is no hint of this in *Lysistrata*'s revisionist account.

The way history is presented, then, would seem to promote a view of profitable co-operation between Athens and Sparta – a theme which is picked up by the Spartan's song about the Persian Wars at 1248–72, where both sides' achievements are given equal weight and where prayers are made for lasting unity between the two cities. The one instance of a Spartan hostile to Athens comes at 274–80 where, as I have mentioned, the (unsympathetic?) men's Chorus makes mention of King Cleomenes' occupation of the Acropolis in 508 BCE. Let us note, though, that this is the same Cleomenes who is later credited with helping to put an end to the tyranny. Once again, then, an unfavourable swipe against the Spartans by the men's Chorus can be thought of as revisited and trumped by a positive image later in the play.



One group of Spartans about whom nothing at all bad is said is its women. For example, when Lampito arrives at the women's meeting she is addressed by *Lysistrata* in glowing terms: 'Darling, what beauty you display! What a fine colour, and what a robust frame you've got! You could throttle a bull!' (80–81), to which *Calonice* adds, 'What a splendid pair of tits you've got!' (83). Sparta was famed for the beauty of its women and *Lampito* seems to be no exception. What is more, she is physically fit, assertive and, perhaps, has her breasts on display – a portrayal which thus fits in well with what we know of the (stereotypical) image of Spartan women in the Greek world (on naked exercise, see *BHAG*, p.88 and the picture by *Degas* on p.107). This praise of Spartan lasses is picked up again in the song which ends our text of the play, where they are said to dance 'like fillies, raising clouds of dust with their feet' beside the River *Eurotas* (1309–11).

One question which may have struck you, but with which your translation does not allow you to engage, is that of the Spartans' dialect. Spartan Greek differed from Athenian Greek just as many dialects of English differ from one another; that is, there were key

differences in both pronunciation and vocabulary. Here, then, there was an opportunity for Aristophanes to mock the Spartans, perhaps by making them appear incomprehensible, stupid or unsophisticated because of their different use of language. An analysis of the Spartans' Greek, however, shows nothing of the kind: rather, Aristophanes seems to have made efforts faithfully to capture the pronunciation and vocabulary of Spartan Greek – leading at least one scholar (Harvey, 1994) to wonder how Aristophanes' knowledge of the dialect was so sound.

There are two further, more subtle points you may have made. The first concerns the motif of religion in the play. We have already noted how we are constantly reminded of women's role in religious activity throughout the play, and this emphasis is reinforced by the play's setting on the Acropolis, which is sacred to Athena. It is surely significant, then, that in the *Lysistrata* Athena is specifically linked not just to Athens but also to Sparta. For example, she is praised by the Spartans as 'Athena of the Bronze House' at line 1299, prompting us to recall that she was also the presiding goddess of Sparta's citadel, where her bronze-plated temple stood. Thus the audience is reminded in no uncertain terms of the religious practices the two cities share. Remember too that a traditional hymn to Athena would have closed the play.

Second is the use of song and dance in the play. Spartans were much celebrated for their achievements in both these fields and a good part of the celebrations at the end of the play are taken up by these activities. Can we go as far as claiming that the Athenian audience is being shown the best points of Spartan culture in the *Lysistrata*? If so, is the effect to make them feel better disposed towards their Spartan foes?

At this point we perhaps need to make one point explicit, namely that Aristophanes as the author of the play is responsible for its themes and the sentiments spoken by its characters. This is not the same, however, as claiming that every opinion, whichever character espouses it, in whatever context, is necessarily that of Aristophanes. There may be all kinds of reasons why an author might (consciously or unconsciously) have his characters state opinions contrary to his or her own. That said, it is nevertheless tempting to assert, along with many scholars, that Aristophanes is championing a pro-Spartan, Panhellenic viewpoint in this play. If so, did Aristophanes hope to persuade members of his audience to sue for peace with Sparta? We must also

note that there are other scholars who see no political agenda in the play. On what grounds do you think they might do this?

Whatever your response to these questions, the striking thing about Aristophanes' portrayal of Sparta in this play is surely the extraordinary licence he takes. As you know full well, the *Lysistrata* was performed in wartime – and yet the play blatantly, I would say, depicts Athens' enemy in a better light than Athens itself. I would further claim that this positive portrayal of the Spartans remains shocking, even if we choose to read the play's 'message' as being that Hellenic unity against the threat posed to Greece by Persia in 411 BCE (see *BHAG*, p.218 and Section 4.3 above) was more important for Athens than settling scores with Sparta. There is an interesting parallel with *Persians* here, I think, and you may find it useful to reflect briefly on the way the enemy is characterised in the two plays.

In his work as a whole, Aristophanes regularly broaches unpalatable issues and puts forward unpopular and unfashionable views – we even find explicit 'opinion pieces' in the *parabaseis* of most of his plays (i.e. the direct addresses to the audience which the *Lysistrata* happens to lack). Inevitably the nature of the *parrhesia* or 'freedom of speech' afforded to Old Comedy has roused much interest among scholars – and the only indication we have that Aristophanes (or indeed any Old Comic poet) was judged to have gone too far was in 426 BCE when the politician Cleon (probably) prosecuted Aristophanes over the way he had been portrayed in the (now lost) *Banqueters*. You might find it useful to take a moment to think about the ways *Lysistrata* could be said to be critical of individuals, institutions or policies, or to put forward unusual policies. How 'serious' do you think these criticisms and suggestions are?

If there are any dates you would like to add to your timeline, take the opportunity to do so now.



Exercise

Let's now turn to our second question:

- How would the play be different if there were no humour?

Take a few minutes to think about this question and write down any ideas which come to you, however impressionistic they may be. There is no right or wrong answer and a number of ways of approaching this question, so don't be concerned if your answer differs from the points made below.

Discussion

As I said above, don't worry if your response to this question differs from mine – as long as you are able to back up what you say. This is an open-ended question and one which is bound to elicit something of a personal response.

For me, the most obvious point to make is that without humour the play would simply be less fun. The jokes, puns and slapstick all serve to make the play lively and interesting and to raise a laugh from an audience or reader. In this vein, too, I would say that there are exuberant elements in the play such as pieces of word play and flights of fancy which, while not perhaps 'humorous', nevertheless fit very neatly alongside the humour. Perhaps these lively features of the play would look out of place or seem forced if the humour were not there.

To build on this last idea (which was already somewhat impressionistic), I would argue that central features of the play such as the fantasy, or what I earlier described as 'comic logic', would also seem out of place in a play with no humour. While fantasy can exist without humour and humour without fantasy, the two nevertheless seem to be natural bedfellows. For example, the theme of a sex strike organised by the city's traditionally passive and respectable housewives does not *necessarily* require humour, but it does, in my view, lend itself peculiarly well to comic treatment.

Humour is also an appropriate medium for tackling difficult issues. Various sociological studies highlight the use of humour in modern society for broaching awkward subjects such as sex and death. The reason why humour is used in discussing such topics is that it conveniently allows the speaker to raise an issue or express a point of view and then disclaim responsibility for what he or she has said. 'I was only joking', we can say, and then pretend that our comment was only made to raise a laugh (but note that the opposite can also be true, where more than we intend can be read into our jokes!)

In the light of this observation, we might wish to make the connection with our earlier discussion of Aristophanes' political views. Humorous plays can be thought of as providing a perfect vehicle for a playwright to put forward unpalatable views or to make personal attacks, since it is near impossible for anyone in the audience to state with certainty whether the sentiment expressed is a firmly held conviction of the author, or 'just' a joke, or 'just' part of the comic fantasy. We should add here, though, that awareness of this fact brings us no nearer to being able to identify which, if any, of the views expressed in the play

really were those of Aristophanes! What I think we can claim, however, is that abuse, mockery, obscenity and other 'difficult' areas of discourse are made palatable through humour; that is, the presence of humour somehow plays a role in softening the brazenness of the personal attacks and the shocking nature of some of the language and imagery found in Old Comedy. Also relevant here, no doubt, is that humour can help an author to get an audience on side: perhaps an audience is less likely to be offended at Aristophanes' outrageousness and more likely to side with his views for the simple reason that we tend to be well-disposed to someone who makes us laugh.

A last, rather obvious, point to make is that the humour in the play gives us some indication of what made the Greeks laugh. Sexual humour, puns and visual humour all feature heavily in the play and, while some of the jokes are highly sophisticated, the majority tend not to be. You may have found the four choral odes at 1043–72 and 1189–1215, all relying on the same unimaginative idea for their punch line, particularly lame, for example, and the scene where Myrrhine teases her husband Cinesias may also go on too long for modern tastes. With cultural norms of humour subject to such huge variation, what may impress us more, though, is just how fresh and amusing much of the humour still is.

4.5 From text to performance

In this final section of Part 4 you will be asked to consider the challenges involved in staging a play such as the *Lysistrata* for a modern audience – the process of turning text into performance. No doubt mounting a modern production of this play provides exciting opportunities but it naturally involves a number of difficulties, too. I hope you will find that reflecting on these will provide two benefits: first, to allow you to consolidate your knowledge of the play, and secondly, to give you the opportunity of using what you have learned about the *Lysistrata* in a creative way to approach a practical problem.

For a director or theatre company looking to stage a production of the *Lysistrata*, there are a number of interconnected questions to be considered. What text should be used? If not the original Greek, then whose translation or version? Should the play's plot or humour be made more in line with current tastes? Are there scenes that simply won't 'work' in their current form and, if so, how should these be changed? Underlying all these questions is, perhaps, a more fundamental issue. To what extent should the new production remain 'faithful' to the original text (to put it crudely) and

to what extent should the play be adapted? And going beyond the simple matter of the text, to what extent should the production aim to recreate the original conditions of the ancient production? Should there be a full chorus? Should all the actors be male? Should the production be masked? Open air?

Naturally, practicalities will shape a director's answers to a number of these questions: full choruses are expensive and unwieldy; functioning open air theatres are few and far between in most parts of the world, and so on. However, I'd like you to put practical considerations aside for one moment and think about your response to what is a very open-ended question.

Exercise

If you were asked to put on a production of the *Lysistrata* and money were no object, how you choose to stage it?

Take a few minutes to think about this, considering what your responses would be, both in terms of the various questions I have already outlined above and any others which occur to you.

Discussion

As I said before, this is a very open-ended question and so, of course, it is impossible for me to predict how you will have responded. I think it is worth reflecting on your natural impulses, however (and you may also find it helpful at this stage to think about your reaction to any productions of Greek drama you have seen). Do you tend to think that it is wrong to 'mess around' with ancient plays? Do you perhaps think the Greek plays you have read simply wouldn't be exciting on the modern stage? Do you think the *Lysistrata* might have more to say to a modern audience if its setting were today rather than Athens in 411 BCE? And, importantly, who would you be staging the play *for*: simply for yourself to match your own tastes; or for an audience which understands the conventions of Classical theatre; or for the public at large? Take a moment to think about these questions before moving on.

The 'virtual spectator', translation and adaptation

The last questions I posed related to the target audience of a production: who would your *Lysistrata* be staged *for*? Obviously, I don't know what *your*

response was, but my guess is that if I posed this question to a theatre director about to stage a *Lysistrata*, an honest answer would include all three groups mentioned (as well as peers and critics, perhaps).

In this section, I want to focus on a particular challenge of staging the play, namely creating a piece of theatre which is attractive to the public at large. This concept of an 'ordinary' audience member – or 'virtual spectator', if you like – naturally raises certain theoretical problems but, leaving these aside for the moment, I would like you to undertake a brief experiment to help you think about the relationship of the *Lysistrata* to such an 'ordinary' audience member. For our purposes here, let's define a 'virtual spectator' as someone just like yourself but who (unlike you) happens never to have been exposed to Greek theatre before.

Exercise

What might your 'virtual spectator' find difficult or challenging when watching a performance of the *Lysistrata* for the first time?

To help you answer this question, you will find it useful to reflect on your own reactions when you first encountered both Greek drama in general and the *Lysistrata* in particular. Above all, it will no doubt be helpful to consider the following points:

- What do you understand now about the play that you didn't understand on a first reading?
- What elements of the play might you find confusing/unusual/boring/exciting if you hadn't studied the history and culture of ancient Greece?

It may help you focus your thoughts to reflect on a particular production you have seen – or alternatively to consider the question in terms of the dream production you envisaged earlier.

Discussion

Once again, I don't know what your points of reference are, so all I can do is share with you some of the points that struck me. I think my 'virtual spectator' would find the references to historical people and events baffling and, with a few exceptions, would be unfamiliar with many of the place names mentioned in the play. I also think there are other elements such as the presence of the Chorus or the actors' costumes (especially the phalluses) and the nature of the play's humour

which my 'virtual spectator' would have found odd – if not unenjoyable! There are subtler elements, too, like the way that the play is structured into episodes and choral odes, the fantastic elements of the plot, or the mix of high- and low-register words which my spectator may have found unsettling on some level. My spectator may also have grown a little weary of some of the longer scenes and especially of the lamer jokes!

I found that reflecting on my response to this question threw up some interesting points. It seems to me that the barriers I identified to understanding the play fall into two broad categories. On the one hand, there are difficulties surrounding factual details: 'Where is Thebes?', 'Who was Cleomenes?' and so on. On the other hand, however, are difficulties which are harder to articulate and these, I think, are more concerned with tastes and expectations: the nature of the plot and the humour, the length of some of the scenes and so on. Different as these categories are, though, both represent problems of what we might call 'cultural transfer': in other words, it is the difference between the 'original' culture (i.e. fifth-century BCE Athens) and the 'target' culture (i.e. the modern world in which we live) – socially, historically, linguistically, geographically – which throws up the difficulties in the first place.

These problems of cultural transfer exist for a director and for an audience alike – and for each new production of the *Lysistrata* a different set of decisions will no doubt be made about how they will be tackled. I should say at this point, though, that much of my discussion has taken for granted a fairly 'faithful' staging of the play, whereas the question of cultural transfer may have taken quite a different form for you depending on what kind of production of *Lysistrata* you had in mind. Take the versions of the *Lysistrata* by Tony Harrison (*The Common Chorus*, 1992) and Germaine Greer (*Lysistrata: the Sex Strike*, 2000), for instance, both of which have modern British settings. Harrison's play is set at Greenham Common, an airbase in the UK where women protesters camped in the 1980s in protest over the presence of nuclear weapons, and Greer's version is set in a sauna. Such reworkings are often referred to as 'adaptations' (as distinct from 'translations' of a play) and while I'm not sure I would always know where to draw the line between a 'translation' and an 'adaptation', I think the terms are useful all the same. (Perhaps the distinction I would make is that an adaptation is self-consciously a new work of art – so much so that I would no longer refer to *The Common Chorus*, say, as a play by Aristophanes, but rather as a play by Tony Harrison,

inspired by Aristophanes.) Certainly, I think that there is a significant difference between an adaptation and a translation in terms of the 'cultural transfer' I talked about earlier. In an adaptation, the issue of the gap between what the original text says and what the 'virtual spectator' can be expected to assimilate generally becomes far less significant for the simple reason that an adaptor (as opposed to a translator) is at greater liberty to leave out elements of the text which his or her target audience might find problematic. To put it another way, an adaptor has the opportunity to refocus the play (if he or she so wishes), and thus to narrow or dispose of the social, historical, linguistic and geographical gaps I noted earlier. Inevitably, the nature of these changes will be inextricably linked to the adaptor's aims and objectives as a playwright.

Modern productions of the *Lysistrata*

You are strongly recommended to go and see a production of a Classical Greek play if you get the chance. You may not be lucky enough to find a production of the *Lysistrata* (or *Persians*), but in one sense this hardly matters: since you have studied both tragedy *and* comedy in this block, you should have a firm basis from which both to enjoy and come to a critical judgement of any play you see.

Here are some of the kind of questions you might like to ask of a production (although I expect you will also have others of your own):

- How might someone react if this was their first exposure to Classical drama?
- What elements of the play have been preserved and which altered? (To answer this question more fully you will probably need to read a 'close' translation of the play concerned.)
- Does the performance give you any new perspectives on the difficulties and opportunities involved in staging Classical drama?

Perhaps most essential of all, though, is for you to decide whether you feel it 'works' as a piece of drama.

Exercise



As the last stage of your work on the play, you are now asked to go to the course website and select 'Course links'. Here you will be able to locate examples of modern stagings of the *Lysistrata* (and other Classical Greek dramas). Look at the production details relating to

some of the recent performances (choose around five, but by all means look at more if you have the time).

From the descriptions, are you able to answer any of the questions above? In addition, can you tell how the different social groups in the play were represented (e.g. men/women; Athenians/Spartans)? Do you gain any fresh insights on the play from these modern productions?

Discussion

Once you have thought about these questions, I would strongly encourage you to discuss your reactions in the context of a discussion group or tutorial.

4.6 Historical postscript

Exercise

Now read *BHAG*, pp.220–23, ‘The Last Years of the War’.



Exercise

Then read Essay Five, ‘Performance, competition and democracy in Athenian culture’ by Lorna Hardwick, in *Experiencing the Classical World*.



This essay brings together a number of key threads from the block and will provide you with an important opportunity to consolidate your work on fifth-century BCE Athens, before tackling the conclusion to the block and TMA 03.

References

Modern scholarship

- Harvey, F.D. (1994) ‘Lacomica: Aristophanes and the Spartans’, in A. Powell and S.J. Hodkinson (eds), *The Shadow of Sparta*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 35–58.

- Silk, M.S. (1988) 'The autonomy of comedy', *Comparative Criticism* vol.10, pp.3–37.
- Sommerstein, A.H. (trans.) (1990) *Aristophanes: Lysistrata*, Warminster: Aris & Phillips, p.5.
- Zweig, B. (1992) 'The mute nude female characters in Aristophanes' plays', in A. Richlin (ed.) *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Further reading

Ancient sources

Eleven of Aristophanes' plays survive, of which the *Lysistrata* is only one. Numerous translations exist, among the best of which (for academic study and readability) are the translations of selected plays by S. Halliwell in the Oxford World's Classics series, and the parallel texts prepared by A.H. Sommerstein for the Aris and Phillips series and by J. Henderson for the Loeb Classical Library.

Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* Chapter 8, in R. Crawley (trans.) (1997) *Thucydides: The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions. The historical events of 411 BCE are related here.

Modern scholarship

- Dover, K.J. (1972) *Aristophanic Comedy*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. A common-sense introduction to the plays of Aristophanes.
- Greer, G. and Willmott, P. (2000) *Lysistrata: the Sex Strike, after Aristophanes*, London: Aurora Metro Press. A modern reworking of the play, set in a sauna.
- Harrison, T. (1992) *The Common Chorus: a Version of Aristophanes' Lysistrata*, London: Faber and Faber. A modern reworking of the play, set at Greenham Common.
- Harvey, F.D. (1994) 'Lacomica: Aristophanes and the Spartans', in A. Powell and S.J. Hodkinson (eds), *The Shadow of Sparta*, London, New York: Routledge, pp. 35–58. An excellent discussion of Aristophanes' treatment of Sparta: academic but nevertheless accessible.
- Henderson, J. (1987) 'Older women in Attic Old Comedy', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol.117, pp.105–29. An academic study.
- Henderson, J. (1996) *Three Plays by Aristophanes: Staging Women*, London, New York: Routledge. An accessible introduction to Aristophanes' 'women' plays, including lively translations.

- MacDowell, D.M. (1995) *Aristophanes and Athens: an Introduction to the Plays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. An excellent and highly accessible introduction to Aristophanes' plays.
- Segal, E. (1996) *Oxford Readings in Aristophanes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. A selection of academic essays on key aspects of Aristophanes' plays, accessible for the non-specialist.
- Silk, M.S. (2000) *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. A sophisticated and challenging academic study of Aristophanes' work.

Part 5 Conclusion to Block 2

In this block, you have studied a broad range of material spanning much of the fifth century BCE. I hope that you have been aware of the interconnections between the topics you have been studying over the past few weeks, and have been able to build a picture of some of the recurring issues and concerns we find expressed in our sources from this era. To finish your work on this block, I would like you to spend some time thinking about a selection of such themes. I have outlined questions relating to three topics here, but you may also find it useful to think about other general themes which recur in the block.

Exercise

Read through the questions below relating to all three topics and then choose at least one topic to concentrate on in depth. When you have chosen a topic, try to put aside at least 15–20 minutes' thinking time. I suggest, too, that you jot down some notes and revisit these when you begin revising for the examination. (As this exercise is intended for your own revision, I will not be providing a discussion here.)

- 1 *Social divisions and tensions.* At various points in the block you have identified different social divisions in existence. For example:

men/women

Greek/barbarian

young/old

rich/poor

What other divisions have you noticed? Choose two or three different social groups to concentrate on and spend a few moments thinking about these in relation to each of the four parts of the block. For example, what do we learn about women or barbarians from *Persians*, the Acropolis, the Funeral Speech and the *Lysistrata*?

Furthermore, what other information have you learned from studying the culture and history of the fifth century BCE which is relevant to the study of the groups you have chosen? For instance, what political or historical events can you recall where two or more groups are in conflict with each other?

- 2 *Performance and display.* How important were performance and display to fifth-century BCE Athens? Think about the four parts of the block in turn.

In what ways were these all public texts?

How, if at all, did their audiences differ?

To what extent does each portray the public and private elements of the lives of men and women?

Reflect, too, on what you know of the culture and history of the period: what public events have you learned about (e.g. social, political, religious) and who took part in them? How important was competition to these events?

- 3 *Athens and empire.* In this block, you have traced the changes at Athens from the Persian Wars, through the growth of the Athenian *archē*, to Athens' eventual defeat in the Peloponnesian War.

Who were Athens' friends and enemies throughout this period and in what ways do the various texts you have studied help to inform you about Athenians' attitudes towards them?

How did attitudes at Athens change throughout the fifth century BCE and did all Athenians think alike?

What are the differences between the way in which Athenian sources characterise the Persians' empire and their own *archē*?

As I said above, these are just a range of the issues which cut across the individual parts of the block and the essays, and you may well find it helpful to note any others which occur to you. I hope you find that thinking about the material in this way is a fruitful method of consolidating and revising what you have studied. Remember, too, for each question you attempt, to consider what evidence your judgement is based on (e.g. ancient sources, the insights of modern scholarship, your own experience and/or theories) and to reflect on what each sort of evidence privileges and/or leaves out. I would also encourage you to discuss the topics with other students if you get the chance, as I expect you will find listening to others' perspectives and ideas a useful way of making you think closely about your own opinions.

Appendix 1 Notes on 'Panathenaia' encyclopaedia entry

Peisistratus: Athenian ruler in the sixth century BCE, before the introduction of democracy. If you would like to know more about him, you can look him up in the index of *BHAG*.

Panathenaic vases: see Figures 2.15 and 2.16 in this block.

Hipparchus: Peisistratus' son. His murder was celebrated as a founding moment of Athenian democracy. He, too, appears in the index of *BHAG*.

phylai (plural of phyle): from the late sixth century BCE, Athens was divided into ten tribes or *phylai*. Each of them worshipped a common ancestor, the 'eponymous hero'. *Phylai* competed with one another in some public competitions, e.g. at the Panathenaia.

Kerameikos: the principal cemetery of Athens. You can read more about it under 'Athens (topography), "Cemeteries"' in the *OCCC*, if you wish.

agora: the marketplace (see Figure 2.12 of this block). Again, there is a section under 'Athens (topography), "Agora"' in the *OCCC*, and it comes up in DVD2, *Acropolis*, Track 1, which you will watch at the end of this part.

metic: a free (as opposed to enslaved) foreigner resident in Athens. There is also an entry in the *OCCC*.

hoplites: foot soldiers. They wore heavy armour and formed the bulk of the army in Classical Greece.

Xenophon: an Athenian general and historian, prominent at the end of the fifth and beginning of the fourth centuries BCE. You can look him up in the *OCCC* if you would like to know more.

kanephoroi: literally 'basket-carriers' (always female). Girls carrying religiously significant baskets on their heads played important roles in various Athenian festivals.

Appendix 2 Timeline: Classical Athens

510 BCE	Tyranny at Athens comes to an end with the death of Hippias.
508 BCE	Reforms of Cleisthenes laying the foundations of Athenian democracy.
499–494 BCE	Ionian revolt: unsuccessful attempt of Greek cities in Asia Minor to cede from Persian rule.
490 BCE	Darius, King of Persia, invades Greece. Battle of Marathon: Greek victory.
486 BCE	Xerxes succeeds his father Darius as King of Persia.
480–479 BCE	Xerxes invades Greece.
480 BCE	Greek defeat in battle of Thermopylae. Battle of Salamis: Greek victory.
479 BCE	Battle of Plataea: Greek victory. Battle at Mycale: Greek victory.
477 BCE	Foundation of Delian League.
472 BCE	Aeschylus' <i>Persians</i> first produced.
461 BCE	Democratic reforms of Ephialtes. Assassination of Ephialtes and the rise of Pericles.
454 BCE	Treasury of Delian League moved to Athens.
447–432 BCE	Construction of the Parthenon in Athens.
431–404 BCE	Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta and their allies.
431 BCE	Pericles delivers the Funeral Speech (<i>Epitaphios Logos</i>) in Athens.
429 BCE	Death of Pericles.
424 BCE	The historian Thucydides exiled from Athens.
421 BCE	Peace of Nicias: suspension of fighting between Athens and Sparta.
415–413 BCE	The Sicilian Expedition. Athenians' military campaign in Sicily.
413 BCE	Sicilian disaster: resumption of fighting between Athens and Sparta.
411 BCE	Aristophanes' <i>Lysistrata</i> produced.
411–410 BCE	Oligarchic coup in Athens.
404 BCE	Athenians finally lose Peloponnesian War.

Arts: Level 2

A219 Exploring the Classical World



The Open University

Front cover image: Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens.
Photo: Bibikow Walter, Jon Arnold Images/photolibrary

ISBN 0 7492 9649 6